ADAM IN MOONSHINE

By J. B. PRIESTLEY

FICTION

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THE GOOD COMPANIONS
THEY WALK IN THE CITY
LET THE PEOPLE SING
BLACK-OUT IN GRETLEY
THE DOOMSDAY MEN
BENIGHTED
FESTIVAL AT FARBRIDGE
ANGEL PAVEMENT
DAYLIGHT ON SATURDAY
FARAWAY
WONDER HERO
THREE MEN IN NEW SUITS
ADAM IN MOONSHINE
JENNY VILLIERS

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THE NOVELS OF

J. B. PRIESTLEY

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

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TO

MY FRIEND

GERALD BULLETT

WHO DELIGHTS IN SUCH FABLES

CONTENTS

" . . . Find out moonshine, find out moonshine."

Bottom the Weaver.

"Alack-a-day! sir," quoth Sancho, "those plaguy tormentors (the enchanters) are not so soon tired as you think; for where my master is concerned they are used to form and deform, and chop and change this into that, and that into the other . . ."

CHAPTER ONE

THE TRAVELLER

EVEN when he had bought his ticket, a first-class that he could hardly afford, in the leisurely fashion demanded by such an act of self-indulgence, and had loitered at the kiosks buying papers and a tin of tobacco, Adam Stewart discovered that he had still some twenty minutes or so left. Not that it mattered; they would soon pass He found himself repeating, with the solemn relish of one who achieves nonsense, "Pancrastination is the thief of time." St. Pancras, surely the most canonical of all our stations, seemed to rebuke his levity. Indignant puffs of smoke and steam, sudden red glares of anger, ascended to the great arched roof. The locomotives grunted and wheezed like outraged sacristans. The thin high voices of the newsboys ran together into a protesting chorus of virgins and elders. But no, that was Greek drama, Adam reminded himself, and nothing to do with cathedrals, and it is with cathedrals that large railway stations must always be compared. He strolled towards his train, waiting there with a long perspective of open doors, and for a moment or so enjoyed the feeling of large and superior leisure that visits the traveller who has time to spare, and watched other and less fortunate passengers, scurrying here and there, dwindling into agitated pigmies before his calm gaze. But he found it impossible to enjoy anything else, although there were so many things he ought to be enjoying. He ought to be hugging the promise of the coming journey, and the thought of the little holiday, tossed out of the blue, to which it was the rattling overture. He had always rapturously anticipated such things before—indeed, that had always been the best part of it—but this time nothing was happening.

There, where the great dim cave ended, was the blazing June sunshine, and beyond the few miles of hot bricks outside were the fields that would tear past him hour after hour, scribbling their

zigzag gold and white lines of buttercups and daisies. How excited he had been, years ago, about buttercups and daisies, when they had not formed a flat pattern but had stood out, enormous, magical! When and why had he lost that excitement? And then, he urged himself to remember, there would be at last the North-country hills and moors, lifting up their long clean edges; the huddling grey villages; the heather and the close springing turf that turned walking into dancing; and all the little streams that you could drink and drink. Mornings would be an enchanted affair of sun, mist, and dew, of bright hillsides with vast cloud shadows moving across them, of larks still happily crazed in Eden. And everywhere would be that tanging, salty kind of smell, in which fresh earth, heather, sea, sand, and wet grass were all marvellously commingled. He tried to recapture that smell, but there came to him only the bare scentless idea of it. Nor could he achieve that little hugging ecstasy of anticipation he should have felt, for something in him remained uncaught, and though he conjured up fine phrases, heard himself describing it all enthusiastically, he was denied the glow of real enthusiasm. And now, as he entered an empty first-class smoker, there descended upon him a certain luxurious gloom.

After placing his bag on the rack and his papers and tin of tobacco in a corner seat, Adam turned to look at his reflection in the little mirror opposite. He tried for a moment to examine the dark young face peering out of the glass quite disinterestedly, as if it belonged to someone else, an effort that gave the face a peevish, strained look and its owner no pleasure. A quick turn of the head removed from his sight the straight black hair, the dark grey eyes, the longish nose, the mouth that contracted as he stared, the long pointed chin, all those features that he had carried with him and developed for four-and-twenty years, but that still remained rather strange and uncertain, as if a very sudden darting glance in the glass might take them by surprise and not give them time to assemble. His eye rested on the tin of tobacco he had placed on the seat, but for once there came no answering little thrill. Usually the sight of a half-pound tin of tobacco snugly awaiting his pleasure, brought with it a distinct, if tiny, thrill of its own. Adam smoked his pipes with fervour; he had been puffing away long enough now to enjoy the pipe itself, but at the same time he was still young

enough, as a man and a smoker, to enjoy too the idea of a pipe, so that it wreathed him not only in a cloud of smoke but also in an atmosphere. He saw himself and enjoyed himself as a man with a pipe, mellow, philosophical, wise. He filled and lighted one now, and as the first slow sweet puffs came dribbling through, he tried once more to whip up his interest in the forthcoming journey and the little lounging holiday that was waiting at the end of it.

Though he never cared to admit it, he really delighted in a long railway journey if it was passed in anything like comfort, particularly a journey at night, when it was rather like reading wild romances in bed, at once cosy and adventurous, for you lived in a tiny, lighted room that rattled and roared through leagues of darkness. But to-day the prospect was flat, perhaps because it was afternoon, and an idle June drowsy-till-tea afternoon at that. Certainly something was wrong. Perhaps he was getting too old to enjoy such thrills, boyish affairs at best. He caught an idiotic little voice at the back of his mind solemnly repeating "Nothing matters," and rather impatiently he flung himself into his corner seat. The train could start when it liked now, for all he cared, and he might as well settle down to read. By his side was *Punch*, which ever since his first year at Cambridge Adam had elaborately despised in public but frequently bought and examined in private. There were even moments when he was almost tempted to follow the example of his father, who in his careless middle-aged indifference to the finer points of social conduct would repeat the jokes. Then there was *The Community*, the weekly review he had bought at odd times lately, which in spite of its name was essentially a periodical for the very intelligent minority. Indeed, the contempt the paper had for all majorities was only equalled by its delight at any slight rise in circulation. There were things about *The Community* that Adam, in his heart of hearts, did not like, for its writers were so loftily disdainful, so little inclined to enjoy anything or anybody, and suffered so terribly from the birth-pangs of their groaning composition, that it was a mystery why they should ever condescend to write at all. Yet they contrived somehow to flatter him: nowhere else could so strong a feeling of superiority be bought for sixpence.

There were only ten minutes or so left now and the train was rapidly filling up. Adam had no sooner begun to read than the

door, which he had closed, was flung open, and he found the carriage that after five minutes' tenancy he had come to consider his own, invaded by the imposing figure of a large clerical gentleman, followed by a porter with bags. The assurance and commanding presence of this intruder only increased Adam's resentment. Everything about him, face, figure, manner, was in the high Roman fashion, and he addressed and finally dismissed the porter as if Plutarch himself were in sight and hearing. Adam promptly confounded him and his grand manner. Any company was a nuisance, but nothing could be worse than the company of a middle-aged parson, and a large, loud, autocratic one at that, who would fuss all the time, who would want the windows either all opened or all shut, and would inevitably get what he wanted. For a moment, in the black depths of his mind, Adam headed a riotous anti-clerical movement and saw himself doing dreadful things to chasubles, whatever they might be. Meanwhile the gentleman himself, having long ago bid farewell to any childish delight in corners, had settled down squarely and firmly in one of the middle seats opposite, and was now looking at nothing in particular with intense disapproval.

Now that this cleric had removed his broad-brimmed hat, and there was plainly visible his large clean-shaven face, with its conquering legion of a nose in an excellent strategic position between two Germanic forests of eyebrow, Adam had a feeling that he had seen him before somewhere. That face, not easily to be mistaken for any other, was familiar. And then suddenly he remembered. This was no common cleric but no other than Canon Drewbridge, whose photograph he had seen many a time, a celebrity in his way, who was well-known as a contributor to the Press. Democracy, the Revolutionary Spirit, and all their attendant antics, had no more thorough and bitter opponent than the Canon, who was always called in by the more Conservative papers to give his opinion when anything unusual happened, and always decided that it was the very worst. It was said, too, that his sermons were not without interest. Adam, who had not yet made up his mind about everything, was neither a friend nor an enemy of Democracy or the Revolutionary Spirit, but it was impossible for him to regard such a figure as Canon Drewbridge with indifference. After all he had never travelled with such an important personage

before, and now his resentment vanished, but only to give place to a slight feeling of apprehension. He felt as if at any moment he might have to undergo a *viva voce* examination. When the Canon, taking up a book, suddenly cleared his throat, producing a startling sound not unlike the preliminary flourish of a Lewis gun, Adam nearly jumped from his seat and found himself wishing to apologise, to beg pardon for anything and everything, his presence there, his youth, his pipe, his blue tie.

A few minutes more and they, he and the Canon, would be wheezing through the sun-baked suburbs and then speeding North across miles of shining field . But no, they were not to be alone, for once more the door was flung open and a porter appeared with two bags. Behind him was a thin, middle-aged man, with a clean-shaven face at once mild and rather fretful; a tweedy, flowing tie, straggling hair, soft-collar-attached-to-shirt kind of man, who looked to Adam like a rather unsuccessful water-colour artist. With him were three girls, and not ordinary girls, tall, short, fat, thin, giggling, severe, but creatures so radiant, so instantly adorable, that at the very sight of them the day turned on more lights, everything went up into a higher key, and Adam's heart gave one suffocating bound upwards to be in tune. He had not seen such girls, no, not for months, not for years, perhaps never before. One was fair, one was dark, and one was somewhere between, but one and all were an enchantment, their faces swimming in a gold mist. Were they coming, too? Adam had a fleeting vision of the carriage crammed with loveliness, bright eyes everywhere, of himself being witty and wise, of love and friendship and tremendous adventures with gold hair, grey eyes. Then it all splintered to nothing for of course they were not coming, but were daughters and nieces and what-not seeing this fellow off. He had now closed the door and was talking to them through the open window.

Undoubtedly it was rude thus to look and listen his hardest, but Adam, all his hopes gone tobogganing, was determined to hold fast to the remaining minute or so. If these girls were going to allow themselves to be transformed into three waving handkerchiefs and then into nothing at all, idiotically staying behind and yet wickedly contriving to make everything that left them as flat as ditchwater, they must take the consequences, must submit to being

stared at and overheard. One of them, the fair one, who had something foreign about her, met his glance with a faint flicker of interest in her eyes. The dark one encountered it gravely for a second, then looked indifferently away. The third, who was a little in front of the others and was busy talking up at the window, looked right through him, so that he longed to shout at her to let her know he was there, and not only there but very important and ready for all kinds of adventures. Meanwhile his ears were not idle. Though these girls were not coming with him, they were certainly going somewhere.

"You understand then," the talkative one, apparently his fellow-passenger's daughter, was saying, "you're to pick up Siddell at Lobley and then drive up. We shan't be more than two hours after you, with luck." Young as she was, she was tremendously business-like, and her voice was very keen, incisive.

Her father sounded rather perturbed. "Yes, yes, I understand. But take care or you'll break your necks. And don't frighten your Aunt Muriel to death with mad driving, my dear."

Here the dark one, glimmering with amusement and with the loveliest suspicion of laughter in her voice, broke in. "How many of the——"—and here she nodded—"did you get?"

"Thirty." And the man leaned forward and lowered his voice. "They nearly fill one of the bags."

His daughter frowned a little at this, but the dark girl glimmered again and cried softly, "Lovely, lovely! But thirty what? What do you call them? Pairs? Did you ask for thirty pairs? And are they all different?"

The other girl did not share her amusement and said impatiently: "I don't think it's at all funny, Helen. And I don't believe there's the slightest necessity for them. It's just like the Baron to wire like that, and I can just hear him chuckling to himself, the great fat creature. I don't believe he takes anything seriously; it's all a kind of game to him." And she glowed and looked like an indignant boy, and Adam, his head whirling with bags and pairs and Barons, adored her.

But before there was time for any reply to this outburst, doors were slammed and whistles blown, and there broke out a chorus of good-byes. The fair, foreign girl, who was addressed as Miss Ber-something-or-other, probably Russian, smiled brilliantly and

kissed her hand. The dark one, her eyes still dancing, seemed to cry something that sounded like "Good-bye, my dear companion of the rose!" if that were not too strange to be true. And then, with a final "Be careful, Peter," to his daughter, and a downward peck at her cheek, the man at the window waved them all off and sat down.

Adam felt quite annoyed with him for sitting down, for as soon as he had settled himself and the train had shrugged its way out into the hot afternoon, everything was changed; the world suddenly shrank, all beauty, mystery, glamour, gone out of it, vanished for ever. It was as if all that fine mysterious stuff about thirty pairs and Barons and companions of the rose had dwindled and faded into something remembered from an old book. They were simply there, the two of them, no, the three of them, for there was the Canon (and it was delightful to have forgotten the Canon, involuntarily to have waved him back to limbo), sitting there stupidly in a railway carriage that would probably become stuffier and stuffier. Nothing could ever happen in it, and nothing would ever happen when it was done with, nothing but the staring sun and the idle hills and white dusty roads. The train, with a kind of irony, began to gather speed, and soon London was left behind. Adam looked across at Peter's father, now buried in a book. Hatless now, a cigarette in his mouth, he still looked mild and rather fretful and more like an unsuccessful water-colour painter than ever, so that Adam saw stretching out behind him an unsold stack of *Old Mills on the Cotswolds* and *Rocks on the Cornish Coast*. There was no glamour in that figure. Yet it still held, as a room sometimes holds an echo of old music and laughter and the faint perfume of some vanished lady, the remembrance of such glamour. Indeed, somehow it held something more, the promise of adventure to come. But such promises, attenuated beyond any grasp of reason, Adam assured himself with a wise mournfulness that was not altogether unpleasant, were never redeemed on this side of Cloud-Cuckoodom.

He had thought once of opening a conversation, in which he might artfully lead the talk round to destinations and business and names and addresses. The thirty pairs and Siddell at Lobley and the Baron and Miss Ber-something and Peter and Helen might easily all come tumbling out of such a talk. Peter's father was

clearly approachable, merely shy at the worst, and as they were sitting facing one another, an opening would not be difficult. But the Canon was there, still sitting massively and imperially in the middle, as if awaiting another Gibbon, and you could not imagine many secrets—and if these things were not secrets, they were nothing—creeping out under the nose of the Canon. Besides, even if the cross-examination were successful, it was not worth the trouble, for it only meant that his curiosity would be satisfied and it was something more than that he wanted. That would probably make everything as stale and flat as the railway carriages, the hurrying telegraph poles and undulating fields outside. What he did want he did not know. Impatiently he tossed aside his papers, walked out into the corridor, there to lean against the rail that ran across the window, to watch the Midlands flying past, while his thoughts crept in and out of the drift of his tobacco smoke.

He felt despondent, curiously baffled. Spreading out the mental plan of his little holiday, he found it without fault. The train would drop him at Gloam Junction, and he could spend that night at Gloam a couple of miles away, where there was some sort of inn. Then, in the morning, when all that upland world would seem remade, all dew and fire, leaving his bag to be brought on by the carrier, he would walk over Gloam Moor and drop down into Runnersdale, which some people thought the loveliest dale in England. He had passed through it in a car a year ago, and had made up his mind to spend a holiday there when the first opportunity arrived. After crossing Gloam Moor, he could either stay at West Rudge, a fat little square of a village, or simply drink beer there and walk on to East Rudge, a rather larger village that boasted a good little inn. Then there would be a week's delicious lounging, lying flat on your back on High Moor or Dun Fell, with a glimpse or two from High Moor of Sillowdale, and ample measures of reading (he had brought *Harry Richmond* and *The Arrow of Gold* with him, and already itched to be hobnobbing again with Richmond Roy and Conrad's Captain fellow who was *Américain, catholique et gentilhomme*), of smoking, eating, drinking, and sleeping. It would be all just as he had planned it, brooding over the Ordnance Map at home. He would be alone, but then he had been alone before and, indeed, was inclined to prefer it, if only because you could live excitedly inside all the time, throwing

up turret after turret of dream, and know there was no fear of everything collapsing at a word and a grin. But now everything had collapsed already, gone flat and stale, and there seemed nothing to hug to oneself except the thought of two books, too good to be trifled with, yawned over, in a train. Nor was his mood now, as it had been earlier, one of luxurious gloom, in which there was a flattering touch of elderly satiety, but rather one of real despondency, a leaden sea of feeling through which there moved, with an occasional crimson and silver flash, fine mournful phrases like strange fish.

Those girls, just the sight of them and of the faint will-o'-the-wisps of their fantastic chatter, he knew, had added the last flattening touch. Yet it was not just simply being tantalized, the fact that they had been left behind, that he was out of it, that had made the difference. It was, more subtly and corrosively, the conviction that there was nothing really to be in, he reflected, and began to feel rather like one of Henry James's middle-aged Americans who seem to have no employment beyond an obscure and suffocating kind of self-torture. You could compare it with the feeling you had when you passed a house at night, and all the lights were on, fascinating shadows passing across the blinds and someone playing the piano, and as you stood for a moment, outcast in the darkness, looking and listening, you felt that there was something going on there more wonderful than anything you had ever known; and yet all the time you knew very well that if you were actually inside that house there would be nothing very wonderful there at all and you would simply be mildly amused or even bored, all the glamour, the wizardry of its light and music coming through the night, vanishing. Life seemed determined that either you should see the enchantment of things but remain miserably outside, alien, lost, or that you should be inside, welcomed and snug, but compelled to suffer a speedy disenchantment, your apple eaten. Yet Adam, with the cup of wormwood in his hand, had still remaining with him a dim conviction that life was not really like that. Was it absolutely impossible to keep something of the outside view, the enchantment, and yet have the comfortable inside feeling as well? Was there a magic bridge, and if so, what was it? Was it love, as so many of the poets and novelists seemed to believe? So far, when his heart had been

stirred, he had always been still faced with this outside-inside dilemma, but then, had he ever really been in love? He did not know, and there was nothing in the sight and sound of Leicester station, at which they had now arrived, to tell him. He returned to his compartment.

It was by no means the same place he had left, but altogether livelier, for things were happening there. The Canon and his fellow traveller, now flushed and noisy, had turned it into an arena, full of dust and smoke and clash of steel. They were deep in a large confused argument, each busy hurling his pet universe at the other's head. They were so engrossed that they merely looked up at Adam's entrance and then went on as before, and Adam did not even make a pretence of reading but settled himself comfortably in his stall. The Canon was in his usual vein, and it was evident that he had already flung away at least a hundred guineas' worth of denunciation and solemn warning, even if it were estimated at ordinary newspaper rates of pay. And the Canon always received special rates, particularly when he was in his apocalyptic vein.

"I repeat, the only thing that can save us," he roared, towering and purple, "is more discipline in our public life, and more humility, Christian humility as the Church has always taught it, in our spiritual life. For want of both, we are rotting, sir, rotting." And he glared at his hearers as if only by the power of his eye he could arrest their imminent decomposition.

But he was not to be allowed to save the world by himself, for Peter's father, timid but gallant, was also bent on the task. "That's your view, and, believe me, I understand what you feel about it all. B-but——" he stammered, as he caught the Canon's eye—"I must tell you that I b-believe you're all wrong. Surely we've too much discipline and humility already. No, no, allow me, one moment. We're hag-ridden, afraid. The splendour of the individual, that's it, that's what we've to get back to. Pride, courage! Pride in ourselves! Courage to live in our own way!" And he waved his hand, apparently towards a group of cows that was rushing past the window. "To be masters of the world!"

"Masters of a dung-heap, sir! And none the less a dung-heap because we have lately fitted it with wireless and other childish fiddle-faddles." Here the Canon flung out a forefinger as if to call

up two or three more legions. "It is such doctrines that have brought us to the condition we are in now, a world rotten and seething with disaffection, revolt. Upstarts everywhere, and nobody knowing his own place, atheists to a man. Once you begin worshipping the world, this is what happens; you make it no longer fit to live in, not even for the three-score years we are crawling about in it. We need chastening, sir, chastening!"

"I grant you that. It's no longer fit to live in. But isn't it only because we've lost our old noble pride, our fine old loyalties, the very spirit of romance? No, we've not lost them, but they've buried away somewhere and they'll spring up at a touch when the moment comes. Everything can be changed, and may be changed sooner than you think."

"I've seen a good many changes," the Canon interrupted, "and they've all been for the worse, Jack becoming as good as his master and then thinking himself better. Heads in air and no backbone. Bad to worse, that is the sum total of all the modern movements, bad to worse!"

"But what we must have," his companion went on, "if you will kindly allow me to say so, is more pride in ourselves, more courage, more confidence. We must recapture, if I may say so without offence to one of your persuasion, that old fine carelessness, not mere recklessness, you must understand, but a confident belief in the great moments of this life——"

"A contrite heart," the Canon thundered away, "is nothing but mere words now. And what is the result? Why——"

"Only in this way can we reach what we might call the fine flower of personality, a world adventurous, beautiful. But don't mistake me, for I can appreciate——"

"——An outer discipline; every man knowing his place and keeping in it. An inward humility, a desire to learn, to be shown the way, to understand; a reverent belief——"

"——A moment will come, perhaps it is at hand now, when a lead will be given, and if that fails——"

"——Or else universal catastrophe. We have our choice."

"——Lost indeed. But that can save the world."

And so the duet ended, suddenly, breathlessly, and Adam found himself no longer battling in a tide of sound, but high and dry on the shores of silence, a silence only broken by the monotonous

churning of the train, which drowned the heavy breathing of the debaters and all the noises of that world which was running past them on its way to salvation or doom. And there crept into this quiet a quality of irony that made them all avoid one another's eyes. Perhaps it was to break this that Peter's father, as Adam now called him, remarked a trifle wearily: "But sometimes I despair of it all."

"I have despaired of it for years," the Canon rejoined heavily.

And Adam felt that he too despaired of it all, and wished he had the courage to say so. But whether the man who at that moment flung open the door also despaired of it, they were never to know, for all that he said was "Take your seats now for the first dinner, gentlemen."

And all three of them, still without exchanging a glance, then departed to take their seats for the first dinner.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DISGUISES

In the dining-car, Adam found himself separated from his two companions, who were given a little table on the opposite side. He was by himself, a lonely figure eating its way through five courses and across two counties. There is a certain pleasure, even for the sophisticated, in spooning soup and hacking a cutlet while a panorama of England is being swiftly unrolled at each side, in rushing through several hundred yards of space between one bite and the next. Adam could also enjoy the feeling known to everyone who dines in a train, that feeling of having cunningly killed time, of having cheated the journey out of one of its monotonous hours. But these were only fleeting pleasures and could not prevent the dinner from being a dull affair, distinctly an anti-climax after that world-saving in the carriage. Adam was so determined not to be taken in that his whole life seemed to be dedicated to hunting what he called "the snag," and he was always on the watch for anti-climaxes and always mournfully congratulated himself whenever he found one; yet there was still something left inside him that would not accept the situation, would not face the facts, and so was for ever feverishly hoping and for ever wailing its disappointment. By the time he had drained the last of his bottled beer—and bottled beer itself is something of an anti-climax, every succeeding mouthful shedding brightness and savour—and was ready for coffee, his spirits had sunk to their former level and he told himself again that nothing could happen. He was still young enough to want something to happen, even immediately after dinner.

The only thing that was happening was that the tall man sitting by himself lower down the car was still staring; and there was obviously very little to be made out of that. It does not say much for the company present at dinner that the tall man should have excited most interest, for Adam had to confess that he was hardly a

startling figure. The imagination could only recognize in him a mere make-shift. One feature alone claimed your attention, and that was his long shaven upper lip, a strangely unreal upper lip that seemed to be wincing at its own nudity and to be haunted by the ghost of a large moustache. For the rest, this was an erect, thinnish fellow who might be anything between forty-five and fifty-five, with short greying hair, bushy brows and a turned-down melancholy nose. He wore his clothes, very self-effacing garments, not as if he had bought them, but as if he had been entrusted with them for a few weeks. At one moment he suggested a commissionaire who had recently come into a small fortune and at another he looked like a retired major who had taken to travelling in something unassuming and genteel. His present occupation, apart from the quiet and systematic disposal of his food, was staring. He stared at Adam, at the Canon, or at least at the back of the Canon's neck, and most of all he stared at Peter's father. There was no meaning to be wrung out of his stares; he did not seem to be friendly, menacing, puzzled, even commonly inquisitive; he just blankly stared and stared. Adam began to wonder if he really saw anything at all, if he was not merely ruminant, engaged in nothing beyond chewing his cutlet. When the dinner was done, he sat on, neither smoking nor lounging but erect over his coffee. Now and then he would give a sharp glance out of the window, as if to make sure that the train was going in the right direction, but the remainder of the time he spent in gazing at his fellow travellers. When the Canon and Peter's father rose and departed, he stared them out of the car. Rising and departing after them, Adam left him still staring: he could feel the little eyes in the middle of his back.

He returned to the carriage to find there an easier and more friendly atmosphere. Peter's father, now puffing at a bent cherry-wood pipe that almost turned him back again into an art student, looked up and gave Adam a little grin of recognition. He also received a nod from the Canon, who had discovered somewhere in his wilderness an excellent cigar and was now at peace, looking as if at any moment he would produce *Deus nobis haec otia fecit* or something of that kind, for the enjoyment of the company. Adam could feel himself already screwing his face into that look of keen appreciation demanded by a mellow Virgilian tag. He

responded at once to this new atmosphere They had dined and were now being soothed by their tobacco; the shadows were lengthening outside; they were travellers nearing the end of their journey and at peace together: here then was a ripe and friendly hour. Adam lounged in his corner and let his spirit expand and overflow. There was still some touch of melancholy, a faint mist of disillusion, in his inmost heart, but now this feeling only drew him closer to his companions, with whom he was ready to share secrets, to exchange wistful dreams, to conclude in mellow wisdom Failing that, he was not averse to a little general conversation—even yet the Baron and the rest might be waiting in the wings eager for the merest hint of a cue—and that, it was clear, might break out any moment. But for a while they smoked in silence luxuriously watching, it would seem, the broken ice go floating, melting, away.

It was trumpery enough when it did begin, that conversation, nothing but little questions and answers, not much better than the dialogues in the phrase-books for foreign travellers, and yet, as Adam felt at the time and did not merely imagine afterwards, it was ringing up a curtain. Peter's father began it, and in a way began everything that happened afterwards, by enquiring what time they were due at Lobley.

Adam was vague and said so, vaguely; but the Canon, who was obviously the kind of man who stands no nonsense from trains, replied promptly: "Eight o'clock, sir." He took out a hunter, opened and shut it with decision, and went on: "We ought to be there in little more than a quarter of an hour, but we're several minutes late. Say ten past eight. You get out there, do you?"

The other replied that he did. And to pick up Siddell, Adam added to himself, and could not help thinking that, when you came to look at it, there was something distinctly flattening about that picking up of Siddell. The thirty pairs and the Baron and the rose business would have to be uncommonly piquant to counterbalance Siddell.

"I know the town well," the Canon remarked, "but I've never liked the place. One of those industrial-agricultural hybrids that combine the stupidity and ignorance of your little country town with the dirt and vice of your industrial cities. Nothing to be done with such places. But perhaps I'm offending your civic pride."

"Not at all, not at all," came the reply. "I know nothing about the town, beyond the fact that it's very dirty. I'm merely getting out there to meet a friend, and then going on by car to the country, the dales."

"Then you're to be congratulated," exclaimed the Canon, "first because you are escaping Lobley, and, secondly, because you are going to the dales. Wonderful country, wonderful, perhaps the best we have left! Those high moors still keep out most of the vandals and vulgarians. I'm going there myself, to Sillowdale, an old retreat of mine. Is that your way?"

There is a compelling force about direct questions of this kind, so that if they are not immediately resisted by the mind they will drag out an answer, particularly when they have a Canon Drewbridge behind them. Adam could see that Peter's father would have liked to have been evasive, but had not grappled with the situation in time. "No, that is, I think not," he stammered; "I'm not sure because I don't know the country well."

Onward marched the Romans, oblivious of barbarians shaking their fists in the undergrowth. "Ah! now I know it very well," pursued the Canon, who looked as if he had more than once divided it into three parts. "Perhaps I can tell you. Where is your destination?"

There was no help for it. The reply came: "Runnerdale."

Runnerdale! Adam wanted to break in with a round of applause. Would the Baron be there, waiting for his thirty pairs? And those three girls? They were going somewhere. And what was it that Peter had said? Something about not being two hours after him? Did that mean that they were all coming, only by car instead of rail? Was he going to be in it, after all? But what was "it"? Probably nothing but a fussy little house-party, and an hour's tennis and a cup of tea for him after the most feverish hanging around and angling. And yet—dear old Runnerdale!—who would go anywhere else! And for one happy second, he had a vision of it filled with laughter and all alight with merry eyes, gold hair, dark hair, among the heather; flowerlike faces lifted to the moon.

Meanwhile the Canon, having reached his objective, was almost equally triumphant. "Oh! Runnerdale. The very next dale, of course. You could hardly do better, though I have always

thought myself that Sillowdale has the finer contours and is a shade the more bracing of the two. You will probably meet there an old acquaintance of mine, whom I haven't seen for years now, Baddeley-Fragge, Sir Arthur Baddeley-Fragge. A curious person. Baddeley-Fragge, an unsoundness somewhere there. One of those men of no perceptible mental weight who yet always seem to be unbalanced. But a gentleman, of course. Perhaps you know him already?"

The other admitted, with marked reserve, that he had met Sir Arthur Baddeley-Fragge, and was obviously disinclined for any further catechism. Partly to hide his unwillingness and partly because the train was nearing Lobley and the end of his journey he began vaguely fussing with his things. The Canon, who realized that he had pushed his inquiries too hard and had no desire to relapse into an embarrassed silence, now turned to Adam.

"And is this your destination too, or do I have the pleasure of your company, so far your very silent company, a little further?"

"I get off at Gloam Junction." Adam's voice sounded queer and rusty to him after its long silence.

"Ah, yes. So you too are for my part of the world?" And the Canon looked for a moment as if he had made that part of the world.

Adam said, "Yes, Runnerdale," and at the same time looked to see what effect the announcement would have on Peter's father, now collecting his things. He was rewarded by a swift, and it seemed, either puzzled or startled glance.

No, he replied to the Canon, it was not absolutely his first visit, for he had spent a day motoring in the neighbourhood a year ago. The Canon was very patronising about this day.

"You may really say that you have not seen the country," remarked that dignitary, gravely, justly, and quite insufferably, "for a day of that kind gives you nothing. You must explore on foot, see it in this light and then in that light, in all its varying moods. Strange as it may sound, it has its surprises even for those who know it well. But then perhaps there is nothing strange to you in that. Life itself to you at your age, I imagine, is still infinitely surprising, with something to astonish round every corner. Later you will arrive at our view"—and here he waved his hand towards his contemporary, still fussing with his

bags—"and find that all the surprises are gone and that everything may be safely anticipated. You will discover that life keeps to a programme."

This was precisely the view that Adam flattered himself he had held for some time, but he was by no means ready to accept it from the Canon. It is one thing to arrive at quiet disillusion by yourself, and quite another thing to have it thrust upon you, to see a strange hand brush the rainbow from the sky. So he answered, lightly: "I've no doubt that life does work to a programme, sir. But is the programme on sale? I shouldn't be surprised if I were considerably astonished a great many times these next twelve months."

"You wouldn't be surprised, eh? Well, at least you would be agreeing with me in that," said the Canon, apparently unaware of the Alice-in-Wonderland turn the conversation had taken. "For my own part, I feel that I know now how things go. I do not expect to be surprised and should not be pleased if I were." Which was distinctly selfish of him, for as he always expected the worst to happen, any surprise would be a gain to the world.

There followed a short silence. Adam looked out of the window and saw the slate roofs and mean streets of Lobley that waited for dusk and some fleeting touch of dignity. Peter's father was now standing facing his luggage-rack and apparently engaged in putting away a book.

"You are not, by any chance, a member of the Murchison family down at Stott in Runnerdale?" inquired the Canon. "I seem to see a family likeness."

"No," said Adam firmly, "my name is Stewart."

The name was no sooner out of his mouth than things happened, frantically. Peter's father gave a start, turned round, crying involuntarily, "Why, then!" but had time to say no more for the train, too, gave a start, lurching as it turned into the station, and the next moment the contents of the bag he had opened on the rack came flying out. It was a sudden crazy shower of black, brown, grey and golden hair. Whiskers! False whiskers! Moustaches, beards, side-whiskers, scattering all over the seat and the floor. One rakish golden-brown beard went sliding slowly over the Canon's knee. Adam felt his heart bursting into an ecstatic doxology. Thirty Pairs!

And then all was chaos: the Canon still staring speechless, feebly waving beards away from his knee; and Peter's father, crimson, agitated, muttering something inaudible and cramming false whiskers into his bag; the train at a standstill and porters shouting "Lobley, Lobley"; and everything mixed into one glorious rich pudding of the commonplace and the preposterous. With one final backward glance, the owner of the whiskers having more or less hived them at last, tumbled rather than stepped out of the train, bags in hand, shot himself into the mass of porters, luggage barrows, passengers, newsboys, refreshment wagons, and was soon lost to sight. Adam's eye followed him as it might have followed a meteor. The Canon, now an imperial hue, stood up and faced the station as if it swarmed with Goths and he was the last centurion. The door, still open, was one vast gaping grin.

No other passengers came to join them. It was unthinkable that anyone should, for obviously they must play it out there alone. And Adam, as if to put together his thoughts, closed the door and settled back into his seat. Undoubtedly something had gone, some brightness fallen from the air, with the departure of Peter's magnificent father, but now, Adam felt, he could afford to let him go, for surely they were all to meet again; the game, whatever it was, was afoot, and he was in it, tremendously in it. For the moment he simply hugged the whole thing to himself. There would be time enough to think it all out, to read all the little signposts and try one path and then another, on the way up to Gloam Junction. And Peter's father would be picking up Siddell, and hurrying on by car to Runnerdale, and the Baron would be waiting for his thirty pairs, and Helen and Peter and the rest, flushed and starry-eyed, would be streaking north for Runnerdale in moonlight, while he tried to think it out on the way to Gloam Junction. He saw the miles and minutes budding fatly, bursting with promise.

Meanwhile the Canon had resumed his seat, and as one just emerging from an ocean, had taken a deep breath, blown out his cheeks, and was now finding some obscure satisfaction in letting the air escape noisily. As if in answer to this signal, whistles had been blown, flags waved, and once more the train was moving on. It would not stop again before it reached their destination.

The Canon sat erect and looked grave, having visibly shed his previous character of persistent and patronising old friend of the district. He looked as if he were taking up his familiar stand in the wilderness; his was once more an ancestral voice; and there was a weary omniscience in his eyes as he fixed them upon his companion. He held up a forefinger.

"I knew it, I knew it almost from the first," he said gravely. "You probably overheard something of our discussion before dinner. You heard the pernicious stuff that man was talking. Perhaps you said to yourself that it is no great matter if doctrines of that kind should be advocated in an idle talk in a railway-carriage, that it proves nothing. Believe me, it proves a great deal. I knew something was wrong, that that man, whatever his errand might be, was up to no good. The country, as you must know, is rotten with intrigue, disaffection, lawlessness. It stinks with revolutionaries of all kinds, men whose business it is to create disorder, to flout the recognized authorities plotting and planning here, there and everywhere to turn the established order upside down. That man is one of them. You saw for yourself."

"You mean the false whiskers?" Adam put in, feeling that the Canon was reluctant to pronounce the words.

"Disguises! A bagful of disguises!" the Canon resumed with an air of sombre triumph. "I believe he tried to mutter something about amateur theatricals, but the situation was so plain that even his impudence could not carry it off. And he knew very well that I suspected him. You must have noticed his secretive manner. It may, of course, be ordinary crime; he may be a member of one of those powerful international gangs of criminals that we hear so much about now. But I hardly think so. There was nothing about the man to suggest the confident and dexterous criminal. He was clumsy; he was agitated. No, he represents something more menacing to society than ordinary theft and the like, he represents political disorder, social upheaval, those dark forces that are going to put an end to this Fool's Paradise of a democracy we have been trying to live in, with its clap-trap about universal education, gradual awakening of the masses, and what not. Something has begun already, probably with Russia behind it."

"You think, then——" Adam began.

"I think this"—and the Canon held up his hand again, and then

waved it towards the remote and golden hills outside. "I think for an enterprise of this kind, plotting, meeting at all hours, collecting arms, you need a centre, preferably a place miles from anywhere. And the centre is here." And he waved again towards the hills.

Adam looked at them, then at the Canon, and frowned and nodded. He was genuinely thrilled, for the Canon did it uncommonly well, and there might, of course, be something in what he said, a real tearing animal for once behind his wolf cry. And then, as the Canon's eyes were still fixed upon him and he had a sudden desire to giggle, he looked away, looked towards the corridor, and started at what he saw there. The tall man he had seen in the dining-car, the man with the haunted upper lip and the stare, was outside there, and he was staring yet. He was, in fact, staring through the window at them.

"Hello!" Adam cried, for he was really startled. "What does that fellow want?"

The Canon looked and stiffened. "Probably another of them." And he set his lip and hurled defiance through the glass.

To this the tall man's reply, greatly to their astonishment, was quietly and slowly to open the door and enter the compartment. For a moment he stood there, eyeing them with an air of melancholy benevolence, and then in a deep and almost tearful voice, he asked if there had not been another gentleman in the carriage, and if so, what had become of this gentleman?

"He got out at the last station, Lobley," the Canon replied, very stiffly.

"Ah! I thought as much," said the newcomer, slowly sitting down, placing his hands on his knees, looking from one to the other and finally fixing his gaze upon the Canon. "Now, unless I'm very much mistaken," he continued, still staring, "you're Canon Drewbridge. You see I know you though you probably don't know me. You have to do your work in what we might call a powerful illumination, but I have to do mine in the dark. Personal pride, Canon, asks for public recognition, but duty, you might say, demands a state of beneficial anonymity. There's a strain there, particularly as I'm a family man, and any light that fell on me would be shared among many, but duty comes first. But there's no reason against telling you that my name's Hake, Inspector Hake, of a certain branch of the C.I.D. And there's no

necessity for me to remind a patriotic and public-spirited gentleman like yourself that I can call upon you to give me all the assistance in your power."

Evidently feeling that he had made something like a speech, the Inspector relapsed into a sad silence for a moment. The Canon threw a triumphant glance at Adam, whose knees were tightening as if they felt the plot already thickening round them. The Canon was opening his mouth to speak, when the Inspector suddenly went on: "Now, no doubt you've all been talking together on the way down; you may have noticed one or two things, heard one or two things, that might be useful to me, as I happen to be interested in that gentleman for the moment."

The Canon needed no further invitation but plunged at once into a history of what had occurred during the journey, the sinister facts being supported by a full chorus of his suspicions. He said nothing, however, about the girls at St. Pancras and, if he had ever noticed their existence, would appear now to have forgotten them. For him their faces had blazed in vain. Adam could not help feeling a pitying contempt for a person in such a state of brutish insensibility, but at the same time he was curiously relieved to find that the girls were to be left out, and was resolved to be silent himself on that subject. Indeed, there was a moment when he suddenly hated the two of them talking there, with their nods and frowns and their great black lumpish figures; when he saw them as Hagens sharpening the spear for bright Siegfried, heard their voices banishing something gay and lovely from the world. It came and went in a flash, this odd perfervid vision, and the moment it was gone it seemed to him like a sudden thrusting of cloak and sword into the middle of a farce, yet it disposed of his neutrality for ever and he found himself swearing allegiance to an unknown and hardly credible Baron.

The Canon had now come to the very climax of his tale, having arrived at the bag and the things it so wildly scattered. "Here is one of them," he cried, and, inevitably with the air of a conjuror, he produced from somewhere behind him, to Adam's delight, that same golden-brown beard which had once crept like a trail of fire along his left leg.

Mr. Hake was much impressed and stretched out his hand for the beard, which he turned over and over and seemed to regard

almost lovingly. There was a little glint in his eye, and Adam could have sworn that he was struggling with a desire to try on the beard and take a look at himself in the glass. But he merely remarked, "I'll keep this," and carefully folded it up and put it in his pocket.

"Well, Inspector," the Canon said, heartily, "what do you make of it? Disguises, eh?"

"You might say so, you might say so," the other replied, at once reserved and judicial. "And going to Runnerdale? Well, I was going to run an eye over that part of the world myself, which shows you there's still prognostication in the service. There isn't much we overlook, Canon, whatever they may allege in the papers. But I must say I didn't anticipate the beards, not yet, that is. I thought it rather too early for beards."

"Quite so," the Canon agreed, rather vaguely. "And now perhaps you can tell us what it all means?"

"Why, no, I can't do that." And Mr. Hake shook his head mournfully. "I can't do that because, you see, so far it doesn't mean anything, that is, not to anybody but us. These things don't mean anything to you—and I'm regarding you now, Canon, as a member of the public—until, so to speak, they come up to the surface. And most of them don't come up to the surface. We see to that, in what you might call the subterranean department. It's usually a case of just running an eye over things and dropping a word here and there, and perhaps seeing one or two people to the railway station and the nearest port. Intelligent anticipation, that's our business. And there's the whole thing in a nutshell."

The Canon seemed to have a difficulty in extracting a satisfactory kernel from this nutshell. "Well, Inspector, you have your orders, I suppose, and must keep your own counsel. And I have my suspicions, and, as a matter of fact, was just outlining them to this young—to Mr.—er—Stevens—here——"

"Stewart," Adam interposed sharply. People who were vague about his name annoyed him. And then he wondered if anything would happen this time.

It did. The Inspector, cutting off the flow of the Canon's speech with a little movement of his hand, suddenly concentrated his attention upon Adam. "Mr. Stewart, eh?" he said musingly. "And how far might you be going, Mr. Stewart? Up to Scotland?"

Adam hesitated for a moment, feeling an absurd reluctance to mention his destination, but before he had time to speak, the Canon had cut in smoothly with "Runnerdale, I think you said?"

Mr. Hake looked for a moment as if he were going to whistle, but then merely remarked in his curious deep melancholy voice: "Ah, Runnerdale. And how do you propose to get there?"

Adam found his voice. "I propose to get out at the next station, Gloam Junction, and walk over in the morning." He had a most infantile desire to put out his tongue at the pair of them. The Inspector's elaborate Pawn to K4 manner was particularly irritating and made him wish he had a bag crammed with disguises and incriminating documents.

But all the Inspector said was, "I propose to get out there myself, and we're nearly there now." And he rose to his feet. "I've a subordinate of mine and some bags somewhere on this train to be collected. I shall see you later, gentlemen." The gentlemen watched his long straight back pass through the door and disappear into the corridor.

The Canon, too, stood up stiffly, and after remarking "A smart man, that," said no more but busied himself with his impedimenta, his arched nose reviewing bags, coats and sticks like a proud little general sitting well back on his horse. Adam followed his example, and, to the accompaniment of a steady hum of questions at the back of his mind, put together his things, which now he regarded not with the traveller's solid pleasure in the contents of his pack but with a faint contempt. Already they seemed to belong to a life long outgrown; the fellow who had packed that bag not twelve hours ago had shrunk to a mere slough, and his possessions had dwindled and faded with him and were now things unworthy of the rich giant tightening a strap round them. But that giant himself was shivering perhaps from sitting so long, and now and again his heart would give a leap and a hollowness would make itself felt somewhere in the pit of his stomach, as if the pistol were about to crack for a great race. All the time unanswerable questions buzzed about him like flies.

The train began to slacken speed, and Adam, suddenly impatient to leave it, looked out of the window. There, curving towards him, was the tiny station, wedged in a depression among the fells and dominated by them, yet having the air of being

itself a kind of summit, clean, remote, a high target that this monstrous arrow, launched out of the hot London afternoon, ages ago, was about to strike and perhaps in its thundering impact to destroy. And no sooner had its platform steadied itself than Adam without a "By your leave" to the Canon, burst from his box, still a small parcel of that hot London afternoon, into the cool upland air.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PUZZLED PRISONER

THE moment Adam stepped out on to the platform and stood there in immeasurable space, the carriage he had left behind lost its reality, and everything that had happened there, everything he had thought there, wore a look of the preposterous. It was as if he had pushed open the pit door, the clapping and the flat din of the orchestra dying away behind him, and had found himself under the stars. He charged his lungs almost to bursting-point with the keen moorland air, in which there seemed to come through the smokiness he had brought with him the mingled scents of hay and honeysuckle and a clover-laden breath. With all that he had acquired during the journey withering in that air, he returned with a rush to be the man he was before, who had packed that bag beside him, who had followed with his finger on the ordnance map the tracks across these moors, now shadowy on one side and on the other lightly dusted with gold. The valley was fast emptying itself of sunlight, sinking into a green dusk and sleep, but above, the great lines of the fells and the pale washed sky behind them set his spirit expanding. The simple enthusiasm he had tried in vain to recapture at the beginning of the journey now really returned to him. At the thought of his recent discontents, his rejection of the blessedness of merely holidaying here, his desire to be "in" something or other, to be important to all manner of odd people, there visited him now a curious feeling of shame. He felt hang-dog, a renegade, before the grave pure face of this countryside. The Canon, fussing with a porter not three yards away, now seemed a figure from an old intrigue. The rest of them were characters from forgotten plays, moons in daylight. He brushed off his mind any cobweb thoughts of them and their affairs, grasped his bag firmly and stood there, a solid body of a pedestrian, regarding for a moment the distant hills. They flung him large promises, of escape and freedom.

of healthful simplicities, of hours like ripe apples.

A tap on the shoulder turned him round. It was Inspector Hake. The train and everything in it might seem preposterous now, but their unreality had had no power to steal away the Inspector, to make a phantom of him, for he stood there more himself than ever, and complete now with bags and subordinate. As if confessing their defeat, the hills dwindled and receded.

"Now, Mr. Stewart"—the tone was essentially that of one gentleman to another—"I want to introduce to you my subordinate, who's going to look round with me, Sergeant Rundle. This is Mr. Stewart,"—and he turned to his companion, a beefy, comfortable fellow whose face wore the surviving twin of that large moustache which haunted Hake's upper lip, and whose plain clothes were a mere mockery, as if the Force had suddenly taken to flaunting its uniform. There was about the Sergeant in addition to his pleasantly bovine look, a kind of oddness, a vague appearance of thought struggling with masses of bullish tissue, that suggested that at the right time and place he might be amusing; but Adam could not for the life of him see why at that moment he should be called upon to make his acquaintance.

After looking at them both, gravely but without hostility, the Inspector went on: "I thought I'd better make you and Sergeant Rundle known to each other, Mr. Stewart, because, you see, you're coming along to the village with us for a little chat. Get that car, Sergeant, and have the bags put in."

Adam was astonished. What was the Inspector after? Was he being asked to share a drink, and was this the heavy police manner of suggesting it, or was he being arrested in the neat one-gentleman-to-another fashion that he seemed to remember in various knowing works of fiction? There was nothing in the Inspector's face to tell him, and the Sergeant had departed to commandeer the car. All he could do was to steer a middle course until he knew whether he was a guest or a prisoner.

"You're not—what is it?—taking me into custody?" he asked lightly, being merely facetious as a prospective guest, or coolly polite, adequate in the best tradition as a possible criminal.

"Now, Mr. Stewart." And the Inspector repeated his name, which he seemed to like, as if he were reproaching a schoolboy for a piece of crude translation. "You're just coming along with me,

to the place where you want to go, mark you, for I heard you say so, so that we can have a quiet little chat together. No harm in that."

"Not a bit," said Adam, now the prisoner. "But isn't it rather ridiculous? I've nothing to tell you, you know. And if you've any questions to ask, why not ask them here?"

Mr. Hake looked pained at this. "Because it wouldn't do. It's not our way. How do I know who's lurking about here? This is a delicate business, as you must know yourself, and—well, it might break here with all the trains about, and the porters, and the old Fords there. And here we are!"

This last exclamation greeted the return of Sergeant Rundle, who still looked vaguely ruminant but had, too, the air of one who has just contrived to make, from the most sketchy materials, a motor-car that would take them and their bags to the village. Adam found himself quietly shepherded outside the station and into this car, a roomy but very tattered vehicle.

"Now what's the name of the hotel there up at the village?" asked the Inspector of the driver.

"That'll be 'T'Sun'."

" 'Tsun,' eh!" said the Inspector, as if delightedly making himself believe that the North-country pronunciation made a kind of Russian word out of it.

"Well, just you drive us to 'The Sun'."

And off they went, the Sergeant in front, Adam and the Inspector at the back, rattling over the dusty uneven little road, leaving the Canon, who had just entered the only other waiting car, staring behind them. Conversation in such a car could be nothing but a series of bellowings, so Adam did not attempt it, but tried to marshal his thoughts, which seemed to be as badly jolted as his body. But there came with the rush of air, the dust and clatter, the flowing fields and grey walls, the approaching blue magic of the hills, a spark of exhilaration that was quickly fanned into a little blaze. The mood of the train, when the possible adventure was everything, and the mood of the station, when sky and hills made all possible adventures look tawdry, now melted into one another and poured into his spirit happy confidence. He was back in the adventure, head over heels back in it, but he was also rushing towards the hills and loving them. As for his present

position, it was simply part of the "curiouser and curiouser," and for the moment he had the satisfaction of mingling two gaieties, the inner clear one of the innocent and the outward desperate one of the criminal. It is true that he wore, quite involuntarily wore, the slightly outraged air of a citizen wronged by one of his officers, and willy-nilly there crept into his voice an injured tone; but all that was purely mechanical, part of the social hocus-pocus, and the real Adam Stewart, wondering and peering and capering underneath, it left untouched.

They cluttered through Gloam, perched on the edge of its dark moor, a grey little place for ever filled with the noise of running water, and finally reached "The Sun," which was on the far side of the village, on the moorland road. Clearly this was not a night when trade was brisk at "The Sun," for though the door was hospitably open, there came no buzz of talk, no laughing nor singing, no sound of pots being hammered on the tables. The place seemed deserted. As soon as the car stopped, Inspector Hake, with surprising alacrity, hopped out and vanished through the inn doorway, the other two remaining in the car. After a minute or two, the Inspector returned and with him the landlord he had obviously been interviewing, a bullet-headed fellow, red as a brick and with the tiniest button of a nose. Whatever the landlord may have been told, he was evidently impressed and regarded the Inspector and the Sergeant with respect, and Adam, who had begun to feel something of a desperate fellow, with marked curiosity. He led the way into an empty room to the right, with a large window looking out on to the road, and into this room all their bags were taken. Then he disappeared for a moment and returned with a lighted lamp, which he placed on the table, looking inquiringly at the Inspector.

"What about that window?" asked the Inspector, pointing to the glass, now a dark sullen square destitute of curtain or blind.

"Ah've nowt fer that, just nah," muttered brickface, "but an old pair o' shutters that 'ud tak quarter of an hahr ter fix up."

"Many people go past there?" And the Inspector jerked his thumb in the direction of the road outside.

"Not at this time o'neet. Or at onnytime. There's nobbut two or three live o' this side, 'tween here an' Runnerdale, and they'll be i' bed belike. Sometimes a motter-car or two, but if there should

be one, 'e'll be that busy speeding up for t'hill that 'e'll niver notice there's a winder 'ere let alone look through it." The landlord concluded his speech by rubbing the back of his neck very hard, as if to prepare himself for further and even more extravagant efforts.

"You've got a telephone, of course?"

"Not 'ere, Mister."

"Why, confound it!" exclaimed Mr. Hake. "Surely there's one somewhere in the village?"

"Nay, yer've come away from t'only phone rahnd i' these parts," replied the landlord, with evident relish. "Phone's back at t'station."

"Damned nuisance! But look here, keep that driver here for a time, if he hasn't gone. I haven't heard him go."

"What, Sam, that fetched yer in t'car! 'E's not gone. 'E'll be in t'back 'aving a pint."

"Well, ask Sam to continue with his pint—the same pint, understand, and not a multitude of pints—for a few minutes, until I see if I shall want him."

"And talking of pints," Adam put in, as the landlord turned to go, "what about a drink? Good of the house, you know." He did not see why this conference should be dry as well as being solemnly ridiculous, and if the Inspector did not like it, he could lump it.

But the Inspector had no intention of lumping it. Seeing that it was put that way, he had no objection to a small Scotch and soda. A voice, somewhere entombed in the Sergeant, suggested that beer should be poured down on it, and Adam himself was all for beer. The landlord departed. Adam, lounging in an old easy-chair, filled and lighted his pipe and looked about him. Sergeant Rundle, a massive bulk on an old leather couch against the wall, after a glance at his superior officer, followed with his pipe. The Inspector sat erect on a hard wooden chair that looked as if it had been made for him. The room was of the kind Adam knew so well: the very sight of its low ceiling, the leather in the grate, the china dogs, the photograph of the prize ram, and the smell of it, that curious mixed smell of hay and whitewash and fowlhouses and beer, made him think of innumerable country days, of ham and eggs and enormous cups of tea and weary limbs trailing

underneath the table. Happy foolish rooms! And here he was, in one of them, a suspect entertaining Scotland Yard, he reminded himself as he paid the landlord for the drinks; and the delightful oddness of it all suddenly drew him towards his companions, now nodding to him over their raised glasses.

"Don't you smoke, Inspector?" he remarked, as he and the Sergeant puffed away. "I should have thought that briars à la Sherlock Holmes would have been almost compulsory in your service."

"That's the popular idea, Mr. Stewart," said the Inspector solemnly, "and like many popular ideas, there's nothing in it. I used to smoke a good deal at one time, and even now I like an occasional cigar—a good cigar, and I flatter myself I know a good cigar. But I've practically given it up. You might think you'd want to smoke all day in my kind of work, travelling here and there, looking round, hanging about. But no, it doesn't do. It's too soothing; it blurs the problem, Mr. Stewart, blurs the problem. It's meditative, you might say, and I'm naturally a meditative man, like the Sergeant here, but I'm also a man of feeling, and tobacco is too feelingly meditative. It tempts you to loiter by the wayside—if you see what I mean—in the mind, of course, and then before you know where you are—pop!—you've missed something, lost sight of somebody, and you don't know how you stand." And the Inspector drained his glass very quickly, set it down with a rap as if to mark a period, looked at Adam and said in a more brisk and impersonal tone: "But we're not getting any further. I'm all for being all friendly and comfortable, but what I want to know is"—and then quite sharply—"exactly who you are and what you're doing here. And I want the truth, mind!"

Adam felt quite easy, having nothing to conceal. "That's soon answered. My name is Adam Langland Stewart, and I live at The Firs, Weston Green, Surrey. And I'm here for a little holiday, a week or perhaps ten days, which I'm going to spend in Runnerdale. And that's all." But it all came out so glibly, so like a speech long practised for such an emergency, that Adam himself thought it sounded rather false and felt sure that he looked as if he were lying.

The Inspector stared on. "That's all, eh! And who might your father be, Mr. Stewart? And what do you do?"

"My father is John Stewart, managing director of Briggs,

Stewart and Company, Limited, which owns the Briggs, Stewart and Blue Cross Shipping Lines, and whose head office is in King William Street. And for the last eighteen months I have been working in that office, under my father, and there I intend to stay until the Red Guards or whoever intend to upset us all, turn me out."

Mr. Hake and his subordinate looked across at one another and each gave a little nod, perhaps to confirm the existence of such a company and such offices. Adam had a strong desire to laugh in their owlish faces.

"And you're here for a little holiday, eh? Beauties of Nature instead of King William Street. Where are you going to stay?"

"I intended staying here to-night," Adam replied, "and then moving on to Runnerdale to-morrow. I shall put up at village pubs, as I don't know anyone here."

"You don't know anybody?"

"Not a soul."

"What about Mr. Geoffrey Templake, our friend with the bag in the train?"

So that was the name of Peter's father, Templake. Odd name! "Never set eyes on him before," said Adam. "That's obvious. If you can tell me why he seemed so startled when he heard my name, I shall be much obliged to you. It's all a mystery to me."

"If it is, so much the better," the Inspector retorted. "Keep out of mysteries, that's my advice. Plain sailing's the thing, particularly for a young gentleman like yourself, in the shipping business. Stick to the shipping business and the beauties of wild Nature. And now, I'll have to do some telephoning about this, back at the station, and you'll wait here with Sergeant Rundle until I come back, and then we'll decide what's to be done. A quiet hour with Rundle here will do you no harm; it'll compose your mind, put you in tune with the wonderland of Nature, as you might say."

He rose and moved towards the door, where the Sergeant joined him to confer in whispers for a minute or so. Then the Inspector went out, and a few moments later the car outside was restarted and they heard it rattle away into the night. A certain cosiness descended upon the two left behind. The Sergeant settled himself again on the couch, finished his beer with a smack, relit

his pipe, and looked solemnly across at Adam, who was making himself comfortable and examining his companion and warder.

Signs of active cerebration soon began to wrinkle the Sergeant's large face, and finally he spoke. "Now, you're not going to be any trouble, not if you're a right-thinking young gentleman, as you seem to be. You've too much sense. You see how it stands. If you're what you say you are, well then, here you are then, where you want to be, not a bit out of your way. And if you're not, if you're what me and the Inspector took you to be, for reasons, mark you, for good reasons, then you're being kept out of mischief, stopped before there's no harm done. And, mind you, if you're not what we think you are then"—and he wagged his pipe impressively—"talk about co-hincidences, there never was such a co-hincidence, never."

There was promise in the Sergeant. "But who am I supposed to be?" Adam asked. "And what's it all about?"

These questions turned Rundle into a large-moustached Laocoon. "Well, either you're one or the other," he began, cautiously, "and you know best who you are, either way——"

"Yes, but——" Adam broke in.

"But assooming," continued the Sergeant, doggedly, "that you're not what we think you are, and want to know who we do think you are, you've a right to ask, no doubt, but no right to be answered, and it wouldn't make any difference if you were, not any real difference. Put it this way, now, that either one or other, you're nothing as you stand now, nothing that is to us, but in one case, supposing you're the man we're after, you might turn into something and we've got to look after that. It's always the same with this sort of political business, not like crime, ordinary crime, that is, for you might call this a kind of crime, in the sight of the lor if not in the sight of private parties. Crime's easy, but this kind o' thing's very muddling."

"It's becoming more and more muddling to me," Adam retorted.

"No doubt, no doubt," replied the Sergeant, very complacently. "It all depends on how it's looked at. You've got to take an all-round view, you've got to put things together. It's just like life, and that's why a man that's known the service—*and* one that likes to think it all out quiet-like, for some of 'em won't think—knows a lot about life. It's all a mosic, that's what it is, a mosic"—and

then, in answer to Adam's stare—"You know what I mean, coloured bits all put together. Well, you've got your bit, and he's got his bit, and I've got mine, but a right-thinking man, looking it all over, can put 'em together. And that's what I've learned from the service, to put 'em together and walk away, in a manner of speaking, and then turn round and take a look at the mosic." And he took out a large coloured handkerchief and mopped his brow, perspiring from the attempt to interpret his philosophy.

"Let's have another drink," the disciple remarked, and looked round for a bell. The Sergeant, bringing up some observation about "a friendly glass between man and man" from the depths, also looked round for a bell. There was none to be seen.

"I'll get them myself," Adam began, and then realized, as the other made an uneasy movement, that the Sergeant would not let him go nor be able to go himself; so he added lightly: "No, we'll both go round to the bar, each with his own glass. The walk, Sergeant, will do us good." Undoubtedly it was the fine aristocratic thing thus to gloss the relation between them, even though it meant fetching one's beer, and at that moment Adam was seeing himself as a fine aristocratic fellow at once mysterious and debonair.

So they sauntered out, glass in hand, found another door facing their own across the hall, opened it to discover a deserted smoke-room that had a portion of the lighted bar running across its far corner. There were sounds, too, from the tap-room at the other side of the bar. Here their glasses were filled, and Adam, after paying for the drinks, led the way back to their own room. Once more they settled themselves, lit their pipes and nodded to one another over their glasses in the cosy lamplight.

Most of the talk came from Rundle, in whom the propitious hour seemed to have awakened a philosophic mood whose utterance struggled up through his flesh and wound round the vast obstacles set up by his manner of expression and finally emerged battered, exhausted. He was for ever laboriously preparing the way for some clinching judgment that never arrived. All the time he was listening Adam felt that the world, now a neatly marked little globe, was being exhibited to him in the other's broad palm, but somehow he could never catch a glimpse of it there. The atmosphere was rich with final philosophic conclusions, but it

remained an atmosphere and nothing more: in vain the mind went gaping.

"What I say is this," the Sergeant was observing, after taking leave of his beer, "and it's a thing you'll come to understand in time; that is, if you've got the patience to work it out, which few have. You begin, every time, everywhere, with a kind of muddle, just as we're beginning with a muddle in this business—and it seems to you just a muddle, that couldn't be anything else but one—and then you begin to see, if you're a right-thinking man, not one of the impatient ones, there's such a thing as order and more of it than you'd thought. It's the mosic, again. But you'll say to me—and you'll not be the first that's said it and been answered too—you'll say, 'Yes, but is there order in a mosic?' "

"There's a car coming up the road," Adam broke in, holding up his hand.

The other stopped and listened. "Ah, that'll be the Inspector back again," he remarked, descending from the heights. "Now we shall know what's to do."

But surely this was not the rattle of the old Ford that had brought them from the station and taken the Inspector back again? "It may be the Inspector," Adam remarked, "but it's certainly not the same car, but one much better and bigger and brighter." On it came, seemingly a powerful brute, and as it drew nearer Adam could feel a curious cold flame of excitement licking and running and leaping inside him, so that he shivered a little and rubbed his hands together. Something, he knew, was about to happen; there was a wise old beast, half a million years old at least, somewhere inside him that knew that; he could feel its fur pricking.

There was a roar, and a great light flashed by outside and then was gone. "You're right! It's not stopping!" said Rundle, by no means disappointed. And there suddenly fell a quiet, into which Adam flung, casually, "Yes, it's gone. You can't hear it now. Perhaps the sharp corner on the moorland road just beyond this place cuts off the sound." His companion nodded and put a match to his pipe.

Neither was Adam disappointed, but for a very different reason. He was still certain that something was about to happen. That car, he was sure, had not really gone on, but had stopped just beyond the corner. Some instinct made him surreptitiously work round

in his chair until he partly faced the window. It was impossible for him to see out, for it showed nothing but a wavering reflection of their lamplight, but on the other hand it was very easy for anyone out there, even in passing, to see their room and hear everything said there as plainly as if it were a scene in a theatre. And even if he could not see, he could hear, and he had a quite irrational conviction that he had only to listen hard enough to hear something really significant. So he bent his head, apparently idly regarding his swinging foot and sleepily ruminating, while all the time his ears held the night, ready to pounce upon the slightest sound. For one terrifically swollen moment or two there came nothing, nothing beyond the faint call of an owl, a far-away smothered sound of knocking and laughter from the other end of the inn, and a vague chirruping from some patch of darkness, just the summer night distantly and murmurously telling its beads. And then there came something quite different, soft enough and yet as plain as a shout, something waited for since the beginning of the world, delicate footfalls, a cautious tip-tap-tip, outside the window. Someone was there looking in at them. He raised his head and flashed a glance at the window, then looked across at the Sergeant. No, he had obviously heard nothing. Adam's heart set the whole room throbbing. Someone was there looking in, and the next move was his, for let reason go hang, he knew, the wise old fur-on-end beast knew, his bursting heart knew, that this was part of the game, that he was in it, in everything that could possibly happen this day and night, and that now or never was the next move and that move undoubtedly his.

"Sergeant!" he called, loudly, casually, though the hand he thrust into his pocket was trembling. "Don't you think that the prisoner might be allowed another drink?"

"Well, Mr. Stewart," replied that massive pawn, in great good humour, "seeing that this is hardly what you might call the strictest form of incarceration, I think it might be managed."

"And couldn't you get them yourself this time?" Adam asked, adding, "I'm fagged." And he flipped over half-a-crown.

Rundle caught it and moved slowly towards the door. "Right you are. Only"—and he removed the key and held it up—"I'm going to take the liberty of locking you in while I go. Matter of form. Just in case the Inspector comes back while I'm gone. He's

due now." He vanished and then the lock clicked and his footsteps could be heard crossing the hall and disappearing into the other room.

Instantly there came a tap at the window and immediately he crossed over to it. Now he could see, dimly, two forms, a face pressed against the glass.

"What are you doing there?" asked a slow voice.

"I'm in the hands of Scotland Yard." Adam could not help grinning. "Incarcerated."

"Quick, then!" came the reply "Will this open?"

It was open a little at the top and in a second Adam had pushed up the bottom half, crammed his hat on his head, and thrown one leg over the sill. His bag! He was forgetting that. He stumbled back into the room, while a girl's voice, urgency itself, cried softly, "Oh! do hurry!" and then he grabbed his bag and scrambled through the window. "Run!" commanded the voice. There were two girls there, one already hurrying in front, and he felt his hand grasped and then all three of them were running up the road.

As they ran, they laughed softly and crazily into the night that stretched itself out before them, wide and glittering, marvellously sweet-smelling, moonlit, magical. Bright patches of sight and sound, newly-minted coinage of experience, were showered into Adam's mind: Helen and Peter running beside him, the light and shadow of the low stone walls, the drowned fields, the glimmer of road, the moon hanging over Gloam Moor, and other fragments, purple, silver and faded green, came flying in, until at last they all settled together into one—Oh, yes! that was it—"mosic," a mad and lovely "mosic." And then the three immortals turned a corner and there, waiting them, was a great car, its nose pointing up the high moorland road, and beside it were two more figures. For a moment or so, the five of them formed a group about the car; and someone gasped "Rescued!" and someone cried to Adam, "Oh! Your Highness!" and kissed his hand; or so it semeed, for now there was no telling, now that things had got so gloriously out of hand and were blossoming riotously by themselves; but there they were, the five of them, a group all drenched in moonshine.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE KINGDOM OF MOONSHINE

"OH! do get in. Hurry, hurry! Helen and I in front, and you three in the back." This from Peter, whom there was no mistaking now. There was no time for talk and they climbed in without a word, Adam taking his place in the middle of the back seat, wedged between the two women. Half a minute later, they were off, climbing toward the high moorland and the glimmer of stars. Adam looked at the night as if it were, as indeed it seemed, a strange, dark, lovely lady, moon-coloured, mistily jewelled, and for a moment these and any other grotesque adventures that might follow seemed nothing but her quaint utterances. They were all of them under her spell; even Sergeant Rundle, gaping back there at the inn with two glasses of beer in his hand, was a kind of ruminating moon-calf; and anything might happen now just because for once the night, this lovely midsummer night, was doing what he had always wanted such a night to to, it was taking charge of things itself. The fabric it wove, which had always had a tantalising pattern inside, somewhere at the back of one's mind, had now been woven even more crazily outside, trapping other people and real events in its gigantic shining arabesques. And, oddly enough, when you came to think of it, it must have begun weaving, somewhere behind the dust and the blue, back there in the afternoon: there must have been a stray moonbeam in St. Pancras.

It was time to piece it all together, he told himself, and yet he did not feel an urgent desire to do so, at the best only a kind of obligation to try, as if a hostess had handed over to him a pretty new puzzle and left him alone with it for a few minutes. It was all growing out of the night, adventures like sudden moonlit mushrooms, and that really was enough. There was no part of him left to sort out and compare and sum up, for one half was content to gasp and enjoy and break into applause, and the other

half was busy seizing hold of every shining new event and hoarding it away, perhaps for the time when nothing would happen. He stole a glance at the girl on his left, that perfumed softness there, and knew her for that other girl, Miss Ber-something-or-other, the foreign one, who was at the station. Her profile, etched in moonlight, was exquisite, and the very nearness of it a matter for wonder. As if feeling the sudden jump of his heart, she turned her face towards him, her dark lips parting into a smile; a sudden lurch of the car threw his arm over towards her and it happened that their ungloved hands touched before Adam could right himself. There was a moment's riot in his blood, but it was soon stilled, for this lovely creature, warm beside him, was not yet a person. She seemed to flow into the night.

A voice, cool, decisive, broke into his trance, the voice of his companion on the other side, apparently a woman of brisk middle-age whose personality was compact and showed no signs of disintegrating into moonlight and starshine. "There are two things I must tell you, Mr.—er—Stewart," she remarked. "The first is that even at the risk of offending you, I cannot address you as 'Your Highness.' It is too early, far too early. There will be plenty of opportunity for that when the proper time comes, if it ever does come. No matter how excellent your claims are, at least in the sight of your friends, I think you'll admit it's preposterous to plaster high-sounding titles over a young gentleman who has just been rescued through the window of a country public-house at this time of night. Also, I must tell you who we are, as I don't suppose you know. I am Mrs. Belville, and this is Miss Bersieneff——"

"Nina Bersieneff," there came in musical syllables from the other side.

"Miss Bersieneff, whose home is in Russia, is a friend of my niece's who is on a short visit to this country. Both the girls there in front are my nieces. The one who is driving is Mrs. Maythorn. The other, who has been so energetic in your rescue, is Miss Templake. Her father, my brother, I think you met in the train."

"Yes," said Adam, "if it was he who spilt the whiskers."

"I've heard nothing of that," replied Mrs. Belville, "but I'm not surprised. He has been spilling things all his life. And, let me add, I've no patience with the whiskers. I agree with Peter, my

niece, that the whiskers are entirely preposterous, and it is just like Geoffrey to consent to carry a bag full of false beards the length of the country and then to go spilling them in railway carriages."

"Well, I must say," Adam remarked, musingly, "I don't agree with you about the whiskers. They seem to be absolutely right, whatever else is. A bag full of false whiskers excuses anything: it's a kind of end in itself. But it's my turn to introduce myself. My name is Adam Stewart."

"Adam," and Mrs. Belville lingered over the name as she repeated it. "That means, I suppose, that if you succeed, you'll be Adam the First. Or will you be Adam the Second? If you believe in Divine Right, as I take it you do, then surely you'll be Adam the Second, as the original Adam should count as a king because Divine Right must have begun at the beginning? And it's no use your protesting that that's absurd. I know it's absurd, but then I might as well inform you I think the whole thing's absurd. Even if it succeeds, and there is no saying what will not succeed in this world, it won't be any the less absurd."

Adam looked at her and then up at the moon, thoroughly mystified and a little exasperated. Even on such a night, reason must break in somewhere. "But why should I be Adam the First or Second, or anything else? I don't understand a single——"

"One moment, please, Mr. Stewart," Mrs. Belville interrupted. "Will you please turn your face up again? Thank you." And she looked closely at him, and just as he was about to break out again, cut in with, "I'm certain of it. Surely you're related to John Stewart, the shipowner?"

"I'm his son," replied Adam, a little sulkily, perhaps because he suddenly felt about six years old.

Mrs. Belville was triumphant. "I thought as much. And your mother was Marjorie Langland. And I've dandled you on my knee when you were a baby. Why, Adam Stewart, you've no more claim to the throne of this country than I have."

Adam stared. "Of course not!"

"Then what do you mean, young man," she retorted, "by masquerading here as the Stuart heir? Is it the Baron's trick? Or is it your own idea of a joke?"

"I assure you I've never had a chance yet even to outline my own idea of a joke in all this," he said, "and I don't know what

it all means. I'm not masquerading as anybody, and as for Stuart heirs, I didn't know they'd been heard of for a hundred and fifty years. Who on earth am I supposed to be?"

His companion was audibly amused. "Someone you are certainly not. But I'll tell you. You are supposed to be the last heir of the Stuart family, an obscure discovery of Baron Roland's, on your way to meet him and your faithful defenders or adherents or whatever they are, known as the Companions of the Rose, who are at present gathered together, or at least the more important of them are, in Sir Arthur Baddeley-Fragge's house in Runnerdale.'

Incredible, yet in a flash, it pieced everything together, and unaware for the moment of his crashing kingdom, he satisfied his curiosity at last. The coincidence of his name and destination had led everyone astray, Peter's father, the Inspector, these girls, all had mistaken him for this astounding new Young Pretender, this monstrous anachronism. Nothing, it was obvious, could be more crazy than to set up such a claim at this late hour, but now, his curiosity partly satisfied and the ruins of his kingdom visibly about him, crazy as it all was, he was sorry the claim was not really his.

Nina had been listening and now broke in with, "Then are you not his 'Ighness?"

Adam dwindled rapidly. "No, Miss Bersieneff, I'm not. Just a mere tourist."

She made a tiny clucking sound and looked away, leaving Adam a bitter and futile pigmy, staring at a night that was one huge cheat. Then there were those two girls in front, soon to be disillusioned. And Peter would soon look right through him again, as if he were not there; and Helen, who, by the way, was quite unaccountably married, would glimmer with laughter for a second, look gravely at him again and then turn indifferently away for ever. It would be far worse now than it was before. He had been thrust in, gloriously in, only to crawl out, a miserable impostor. And yet he had known throughout that he must have been mistaken for someone else, and it was very odd, very jolly, to be the victim of such a mistake, to be hurled into adventure when you had expected nothing—he could hear himself desperately telling someone how odd, how jolly, it was—but he suddenly felt flattened, wretched.

"Is that where we're going now, to Sir Arthur Baddeley-Fragge's?" he asked.

"We shall be there in less than a quarter of an hour," Mrs. Belville replied, with what seemed like grim relish. "We're in Runnerdale already." They had left the Gloam valley behind, crossed the summit of Gloam Moor, and were now beginning the winding descent into Runnerdale, which was spreading its lovely length below, a long narrow chalice brimmed with moonlight, waiting for a young uncrowned king from nowhere. It caught at Adam's heart. For the first time in his life he had been compelled to deny that he was one of that bitter-sweet race, born to be heroes of tragi-comedy, to be princes in exile, those Stuarts to whom he had not given a thought since he last laid aside his history books and Waverley novels; and now for the first time in his life he really felt like one of them, a king who had lost his crown in a ditch, a royal Pierrot smiling but hollow-eyed under the moon. And then a glance at Mrs. Belville's composed face turned these thoughts into so many fiddlesticks to be hastily swept away.

"I'm awfully sorry," he began, gloomily, "but really it wasn't my fault. You had better tell the others, and then drop me before we reach the house. I can get put up somewhere in West Rudge or East Rudge, and even if it's too late, it doesn't matter, a night like this. I'm no worse off, because I was coming here, anyhow."

"Nonsense," Mrs. Belville remarked, briskly. "I'm not at all sorry. I prefer Marjorie Langland's son to any young mountebank that the Baron may have discovered. Your mother and I are old friends; I know your father, too, an admirable man; and what I know about your family is worth all this white rose mummery. Do you think I am going to allow you to wander about this valley all night, trying to sleep under haystacks? You're not opposed to this business, are you? You have no absurd strong convictions on the subject?"

"I'm all for it, whatever it is," he replied. "I'm willing to join anything to-night."

"Indeed! Not exactly a safe state of mind for a young man to be in. It's probably the weather and this absurd rushing about in motor-cars." She settled herself more comfortably. "But, in that case, you must come along to the house with us, as one of our party. I insist upon it, and I know the Baddeley-Fragges will be delighted. You must at least pretend to be a sympathizer because otherwise you know too much and might be regarded as a

dangerous person. But that, I suspect, won't be difficult. The difficulty will be in preventing you, after a day there, making yourself ridiculous about it all."

"But, Mrs. Belville, are you yourself a sympathizer?" asked Adam, who found it impossible to detect any fervour in his companion's references to this fantastic movement.

"Of course not. I cannot be enthusiastic about such antics at my time of life, indeed, could not have been at any time since I left the nursery. To my mind, the whole thing is like a game on the nursery floor. You have only to remember the whiskers to realize how preposterous it all is. The whiskers are typical. But, on the other hand, I'm not opposed to it. I'm a benevolent neutral anxious to see that nobody of any importance gets hurt, and, if possible, to prevent the thing from going too far. If it doesn't go too far, and I'm afraid there are signs that it will, then at least it will have kept some of the people here out of worse mischief. I'm here because I like an occasional visit to this part of the world, and find Lady Baddeley-Fragge a quiet restful woman, a little silly, perhaps, and far too easy with her husband, but a pleasant person; and because I want to keep an eye on my brother and my two nieces there."

"Are they enthusiastic what d'you call 'em—Jacobites?" he demanded, making hay while the sun shone.

"My brother and Peter are, though not exactly in the same way," she replied. "My brother had always been ridiculous about something, and the more impossible it is, the more enthusiastic he becomes. Peter has a rather different temperament, and I'm glad that she has this or she might have nothing and merely drift as so many girls do now. She is very serious about it, very severe too, and is really a delightful child. What Helen, Mrs. Maythorn, my other niece there, thinks about it I don't know. It probably amuses her, just as most things, even that large husband of hers, amuse her; and is to her a kind of play, with lights, music, fine scenery and costumes, and a very charming part in it, with limelight and applause, for herself. She is, you know, one of the most charming girls in the world, but very mischievous, and has humbugged everybody about her since the time she was in the cradle." And she looked at Adam as if to suggest that it would only be a few hours before his name would swell the list of the humbugged.

And what said soft and perfumed Russia, now sitting more kindly beside him? Was she a Jacobite too, Adam asked.

"Yes, yes," cried Nina, who had apparently recovered now from her disappointment. "I believe in the royalism, to bring kings, real kings, back upon the world." And as she turned her wide shining eyes upon him, he felt that he too believed in the royalism, more than he had ever believed in anything else. He could not for the life of him see yet what it was all about, but already he was heart and soul in the cause. Restore the Stuarts!—why, he was ready to take up bow and arrows and restore the Plantagenets if the Baron, the more and more incredible Baron, could only find one! He was sure now that the only thing that could possibly prevent such a night as this, with all its beauty, its burden of dream and strange desire, from breaking a man's heart, would be a cause, and the more hopelessly lost the cause the better. He smiled back at Nina, and then suddenly tried to look stern, noble, as unlike a tourist as possible.

They were now in the dale itself and could not be very far from the house. There came a thought like a sudden chill. "I say, Mrs. Belville," he exclaimed, "as there'll be such a lot to explain to your nieces, hadn't we better stop the car before it reaches the house and tell them everything? Otherwise there may be a colossal anti-climax at the house."

Mrs. Belville nodded her agreement, but did nothing until they had passed through West Rudge, silent, deserted, and looking like a faded backcloth in the soft moonlight, and the lights of a large house shone through some trees a little way in front of them. Then she loudly called a halt.

The car stopped, and two faces, still radiant, triumphant, turned round with a "What's the matter?"

"My dears," cried Mrs. Belville, preparing to enjoy herself, "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but this is not the man." At this there was an outcry, under which Adam's heart sank. "Not the man," she repeated, with evident relish. Then followed a flood of explanations, with everybody talking at once, until at last some consistent narrative was hammered out between them. Adam had to explain what had happened in the train and the inn, and, in return, learned how Templake, Peter's father, had mistaken him, after hearing his name and destination, for the Baron's Stuart

discovery, a young man who was supposed to be on his way to Runnerdale, and how he had fallen in with his daughter and her party somewhere on the road outside Lobley, and they, with the more powerful car, had agreed to travel by way of Gloam and make inquiries there about this mysterious young man, who had it was rumoured, somehow attracted the notice of the secret service. Something they had heard at the station had made them cautious, so they had peeped through the window, and the rest was plain to everybody concerned. So they explained, added link to link, loudly corrected one another, and became flushed and noisy and, in spite of the anti-climax somehow triumphant, with the inevitable result that they all suddenly felt friendly and rather intimate. Adam not only took heart but began to feel gloriously at ease. Nina smiled upon him Mrs. Belville insisted that the son of her old friend Marjorie Langland was worth a gross of dubious Stuarts from nowhere. Dark Helen no longer looked indifferently away, but shone like a star over the whole recital. Only Peter showed any resentment at this elaboration of coincidence.

"It can't be helped," she remarked, in the disgusted tone that usually accompanies this phrase, "but I really think it would have been better if you had stayed there. It might, at least, have kept the police on a false scent for a time."

"Don't be fanatical, my dear," replied Mrs. Belville, much to Adam's relief. "Mr. Stewart deserves a better fate than to be a herring drawn across a trail. And after all it is not his fault that he has been dragged into all this absurd plotting. You have at least gained a recruit." At which Adam, feeling a fool and thinking it safer to jump into the part, made an elaborate salute.

It was Helen who sketched a delicious little salute in return. "Will you be a Companion of the Rose, Mr. Stewart?" she inquired, as she stood up in the car and looked down on him.

"I will. I have always wanted to be a Companion of the Rose." He threw a slight suggestion of mock gravity into his voice, but it was trembling a little as he looked up and smiled.

"Quite so." This came, like two chill raindrops, from Mrs. Belville. "I have insisted that he goes on to the Baddeley-Fragges' as a member of our party. And he assures me that he is ready to join anything to-night."

Peter made a gesture of impatience. "But it's not a matter of joining anything. That's not the point. It's——"

"Yes, it is the point," Helen interrupted, but sweetly, "it's the whole point." And she flashed a look at Adam so swiftly and delicately comprehensive that it seemed to him she alone might have created the night.

"Point or no point!" cried Mrs. Belville, "Mr. Stewart comes with us to the Baddeley-Fragges' and it's high time we arrived there. Drive on, Helen."

They started again and within five minutes were sailing up a curved drive that finally brought them to the front of a rambling grey stone house, almost white in the moonlight, with several lighted windows and a spacious hall hospitably open to the night. The triumphant bray of the car brought out a butler and a maid, then some other figures, and all was a hubbub of greetings and introductions and hand-shakings and a confusion of bags and discarded wraps and sticks and odd packages. This high tide swept Adam out of the car into the hall, where he found himself being introduced by Mrs. Belville to his hostess, a thin woman in late middle-age who somehow looked like a piece of faded needlework, and greeted him pleasantly but vaguely, as if he were not quite real. Much to his relief, nothing was being said of the night's adventures and his brief reign as Adam the First, or Second; he was regarded as a friend of Mrs. Belville and the Templakes who had suddenly attached himself to the cause and to them. The owner of Runner Hall, for such he learned was the name of the house, he met a minute or two later, finding him as pleasant as his wife but a thought less vague. Sir Arthur was tall and thin, a brittle-looking figure, very dignified, stiff, and obviously weak, suggesting a devitalized Sir Roger de Coverley. He expressed great pleasure at the sight of Adam; the name he bore being itself a passport to their friendship; his interest in the common cause more than welcome; his appearance among them very gratifying, particularly as the gathering lacked young men; and there was much else from Sir Arthur in this vein, quite a speech in fact, of which a great deal never penetrated Adam's ears, assailed as they were by the chatter of the others. But it was a relief to find himself welcomed without question, for he had been dreading this moment and still felt an interloper, almost an imposter. As he followed a maid to his

room, up the broad stairs and along to the end of a corridor on the first floor, he embraced the still mysterious, incredible cause, and with it the images of his host and hostess and his new friends, not excluding the obdurate Peter, with something like genuine fervour. His room, a small one at the corner of a wing and overlooking a moonlit expanse of lawn, was anything but startling, hardly to be distinguished from half a hundred rooms he had occupied in other people's houses, neat little spare rooms with the chill on them, and yet when he caught sight of his bag awaiting him there, it looked like something dropped from another and dustier world, the things he removed from it like possessions from an old incarnation.

Washed and brushed, with some of the moonlight out of his eyes, he descended the stairs to follow his host's instructions and join the other guests in the drawing-room. What was to come he could not imagine, but for once the big fat hamper of life was before him untouched by his too fervid anticipation. Here in this house, whose yellow interior had already sharpened, compressed, the mood he had known under the open night, was everything desirable, making even his vague longings of the afternoon, the foolish fretting afternoon, seem contemptible. Here all the sweet shining things of this life were heaped together, bounded at last by the four walls that enclosed him; and all else, the whole outside world, a desert. He threw it a look of pity, hugged his good fortune for a second, and then pushed open the drawing-room door.

What he expected to see is beyond conjecture, for he did not know himself, but what he actually did see, with an absurd little pang of disappointment, was a long low room, filled with kindly lamplight, and at ease in it, chatting away, half a dozen persons, including Sir Arthur himself, who stepped forward to introduce him to the company. So far as it could be covered by a brief glance, the company, which had not yet been joined by the other members of his party, was certainly disappointing. Where was the Baron? Absent, he could only hope. And then he made his bows. There was Lady Matchways, an old lady of more promise than her companions, for she had an open, eager face and an air of being at once frail and indomitable. Beside her was a Mr. Hooby, one of those round-faced, clean-shaven Americans who are so inhumanly

clean that they appear to have scrubbed and brushed away all individuality and do not seem to be real persons. Then there was a stringy woman, with a pecking motion of the head, who had just been loudly extolling the unfailing loyalty to the Stuart cause that still existed in the Highlands, and was not pleased at being interrupted until she heard Adam's name, when she was almost frantic with enthusiasm, and showed disturbing signs of wishing to take charge of him. She was a Miss Satterly, and clearly to be avoided. The other two were the Reverend Philip Brasure, a specimen some thirty odd years of age of a familiar clerical type, inevitably High and resolutely and quite unendurably jolly; and a Major Storching, middle-aged and apparently made of wood, which at least explained the extraordinary difficulty he had in making any articulate sounds.

Adam made his tour of the room, scoring up his rapid little mental notes, with a sinking heart. Had he expected too much? Was the old cheat at work again? True, there were others to come, and he hurriedly took stock. There was Mr. Templake, himself a not entirely uninteresting water-colour sketch, and with him would come Siddell. But it was plainly ridiculous to expect anything of Siddell, disregarded long ago. Then there was the admirable, if rather disconcerting, Mrs. Belville, and the whole lovely carful, smiling Helen and Nina, angry Peter, not to be thought of with an unquickened heart. Why, each of them, even Peter, if there was any kindness in her, was sufficient in herself to leaven fifty such lumpish companies, to shine through a house ten times the size of this. And then there was still the Baron, for whose sake so many whiskers had been bought and packed away and finally spilt over Canon Drewbridge. He recovered his spirits, accepted and lit a cigarette, smiled from a safe distance at Miss Satterly, who was about to recapture the Highlands, and exchanged commonplaces with his host and Mr. Brasure and stares with the Major. Templake and Siddell, he was told, had telephoned to say that they had been delayed on the road. Siddell, it appeared, was the new organizing secretary of the society or whatever it was, the Companions of the Rose, and had just been engaged, on the very highest references, by Sir Arthur himself. They were rapidly approaching a crisis in the history of the organization, Mr. Stewart must understand, and there was now much work, very delicate and even dangerous work, to do, which demanded the services of an experienced organizer,

who might later have to direct a large number of agents all over the country. Mr. Stewart appreciated the situation and applauded Sir Arthur's good sense and judgment, to which Sir Arthur replied at length, in what Adam afterwards learnt from Helen to call his best Mansfield Park manner. But where, Adam asked himself, was the Baron. He was strangely reluctant to ask the question aloud: it was as if he was afraid he would be told that there was no such person.

Then suddenly, dramatically, the door was flung open to admit into the room an enormous figure. "Ah! here is the Baron," murmured Sir Arthur. The Baron, indeed! The man himself may only have been some six feet high, broad in proportion, and fat out of all proportion, but such was the effect he created, as he towered to the ceiling and went swelling out to each side, that he seemed in danger of cracking the room. His whole appearance was odd, startling. He was loosely clothed in a half-acre or so of light grey flannel, wore an open collar with unusually big wings, as if he were a statesman in the 'eighties, and with it a surprising large white tie in a sailor's knot. Dominating the collar and tie, and even the ponderous belly below, was a nose, boldly drawn and generously coloured, that came jutting out in full force but turned a little to one side at the tip. Such a nose caught the eye and held it, so that the rest of his features, unusual as they were, merely seemed to be standing round it in admiration. Above were two small but very bright eyes restlessly lodged under bushy brows, and a glistening forehead crowned by an upstanding mass of iron-grey hair. The lower part of his face, falling heavily away, was decorated, as if by a magnificent afterthought, by a comparatively small dark moustache and imperial. For the rest, he had neat hands and feet, was surprisingly quick and agile in his movements, and might have been anything between fifty and sixty-five years of age.

Sir Arthur, now more faded and brittle than ever, instantly made them known to one another. "Baron Roland, this is Mr. Adam Stewart, a friend of Mrs. Belville's who is anxious to join us."

The Baron bowed, saying in a curious, rich, hoarse voice: "He has joined us already. He joined us long ago, perhaps the day he was born. Now some people, hearing your name, Mr. Stewart, might read in it the very proclamation of defeat, see in you, without reference to your admirable person, of course, a walking symbol

of their pessimism. Two lost causes conjoined: Adam and Stewart. We read it otherwise, eh, Sir Arthur?" And he stopped and stared at his host, who smiled vaguely and rather nervously like a gentleman suddenly compelled to assist in a conjuring trick. "Yes, we read it differently," he went on. "You arrive as a good omen. Our task is to win over Adam to the Stuarts. You have already joined them together and thrived on the conjunction, even having rich blood to spare for your cheeks. A rose in the blood, eh? And therefore, more auguries. But I embarrass you? You are saying to yourself, 'The Baron is in execrable taste.' But a word." And as Sir Arthur drifted away, the Baron led Adam to a corner and fixed him with his little bright eyes.

"I have heard already," he whispered, "from our friend Mrs. Belville, who is the very voice of sharp commonsense and therefore to be trusted with the facts, the bare facts, but otherwise not capable of doing the story justice. But I understand. A king for five minutes on a midsummer night, a king of moonshine, isn't that how it runs? And now you're telling yourself it's all moonshine. And if it is, you know, you might have been king yet. Don't you think you might have played the part a little longer?"

"Well, I'm not good at playing parts, you know," Adam remarked as easily as he could, for there was something very strange and compelling about his companion.

"Ah, I wonder. But not perhaps with Mrs. Belville." And the Baron's nose, turned to one side, contrived to look humorous and intimate. "What a load for commonsense to bring through the moonlight! Youth and Beauty! You'll leaven us, Mr. Stewart, and we need it. A lean company, so far; too much string and sawdust. Always excepting, of course, my old friend Lady Matchways, whose defection from the Anarchist cause to ours I regard as a personal triumph."

"Why, was she an Anarchist?" Adam inquired, looking across the room at the frail old lady.

"One of the greatest and one of the last of the old school, what you might call the romantic school, with their garrets and bombs, of the 'eighties," the Baron replied. "She still believes in their methods, grandiose outlines, splashes of colour, and I have difficulty persuading her to accept anything more restrained. It was partly for her sake that I ordered the false whiskers. I felt she was

missing something. Disguise is the essence of the old romantic spirit. Escape and decoration is its secret. Think of the Pre-Raphaelites."

But Adam was too busy eyeing the company and listening to the snatches of talk that came floating their way, to think of the Pre-Raphaelites. At the other end of the room, Lady Matchways was keeping Mr. Hooby round-eyed with a flow of words and some ample vivacious gestures that seemed to illustrate the sudden end of some public buildings and public figures. Mrs. Belville was plainly putting Miss Satterly's loyal Highlanders in their place. Mr. Brasure was addressing Lady Baddeley-Fragge as if she were quite a number of sympathetic parishioners gathered together. Sir Arthur and Major Storching appeared to be exchanging syllables as if they were pieces at chess. Adam suddenly felt confident, superior.

"You're looking at us," the Baron remarked, "you're criticizing, you're putting together some deadly phrases, which I insist upon hearing in the near future, as soon as we are sufficiently intimate to exchange libels on our friends."

"I'm still wondering what it's all about," Adam rejoined. "I still don't know much."

The Baron waved a hand. "To-morrow you shall have all the theories, all the facts, to play with in the daylight. To-night, be content with the atmosphere, your adventures, your moonlight, your penetrating eye. Take these to bed with you, and then in the morning, incredulous morning, you shall have your reasons. We have them, solid ones."

At this moment Adam looked across towards the door, and there, newly arrived, were the night's three graces, slim and lovely: Peter, a slender shoot in green, with her proud little cropped head and clear grey eyes; Nina, who was now seen to be fair, not as English girls are fair, but with a strange metallic tone in her fairness, with bronze bobbed hair, hazel eyes, and a curved scarlet mouth, all decked out in soft blue fabric and white skin; and behind them, in crimson, was dark Helen, a little smile on her lips, her eyes shining across at him. The room glowed round them. Grace and colour were all theirs, as if the garden had taken to sending in its flowers as visitors; but there was about them something more, something indefinable, more potent than their obvious witchery,

as they stood there for a moment, silent, smiling, in the pale golden lamplight; something that caught at the swelling heart and troubled the mind, a sudden pang shot through the drowning sweetness.

"Exactly!" whispered the Baron, and made towards them.

"We've really only come to say 'Good-night,' " exclaimed Peter, a little coldly, as if there were still much to be forgiven.

"You have only to say 'Good-morning' and 'Good-night' to fill our day," said the Baron, graciously if a trifle enigmatically. And he shepherded them across the room towards Adam. "You will, at least, say something to my new recruit, to the wandering knight you have rescued, to keep him company until the morning. Eh, Mr. Stewart?"

Adam turned to Peter. "I believe you've not forgiven me yet, Miss Templake, for not being a captured king. But you have the satisfaction of looking forward to someone more imposing than I am, and I promise to be a most energetic and obedient follower." A stiff and foolish speech this, he felt, and longed for a sword and cockade and trumpet calls outside the window to carry it off. She said nothing, but smiled and bowed ironically, but then her eyes, such clear honest eyes, met and held him in so frank and comradely a fashion that he suddenly felt elated.

Nina, who had glanced round the room rather blankly, now curved her lips at him, laid a light but disturbing hand on his arm, and said sweetly, "I have forgiven you. You shall be a fine young Royaleest soldier, 'ero." A small but heady brew this to be tasted in company.

And now Helen floated forward, slipped one arm inside Peter's and tilted the lovely apricot curve of her face towards him, while her eyes laughed outright and her mouth demurely smiled. "This for our latest and youngest gentleman recruit. Take this for company until the morning, Sir Knight." And she held out to him a rose, a white rose, newly gathered with the dew on it from the moonlit garden.

"Oh, fortunate youth!" cried the Baron, as Adam took the flower. "See what the night has brought you! It is the badge of our service. And do you still want reasons? Go dream!"

At this they broke up in a confusion of plans for the morning and "Good-nights," and in a few minutes Adam, overburdened with images of railway trains, false beards, detectives, inn parlours,

flying motor-cars, comic or beautiful Jacobites, was on his way upstairs, still with the rose in his hand. He had enough pageantry in his head to keep him awake for a week, but his body was twenty-four years old, had travelled far that day, had been drinking heavily of the strong moorland air, and so was bent on sleep, let the mind cut its capers in whatever limbo it could discover for itself. The rose drooped and shed its fragrance; the moon sank down the sky; and Adam slept.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MORNING'S COMPANY

"DEMOCRACY," said the Baron, "is dead. And why?" He raised his fork impressively.

"Why, Baron, because humanity must have Roam-ance." This, very solemnly, from Mr. Hooby, who was busy at the sideboard. "We cannot live by bread al-one." And he cut himself an enormous slice of boiled ham.

"The reason in a nutshell," said the Baron. "Because man is a spirit, eh, Mr. Hooby? And I'll trouble you for a little of that ham."

They were all at breakfast, the Baron, Mr. Hooby, Mr. Templake, and Adam, who had been there some time and was now loitering over a final cup of tea and a cigarette. He had seen none of the other members of the party except Sir Arthur, who had come and gone, a wraith in the morning sunshine, and the picked-up Siddell, a clean-shaven, colourless fellow of indeterminate age with a manner at once brisk and detached, who had also come and gone. Over his porridge, Adam had fitted together the puzzle of yesterday's adventures with Templake to their mutual satisfaction. With the bacon and eggs the Baron and Mr. Hooby had arrived, strangely solid and convincing and with nothing of them stolen away by a vanished dream. The ruin of parliamentary government in Europe had been hastily added to the ruin of breakfast dishes, and as Adam's teeth crashed through toast spread with marmalade, half a dozen arguments had gone crashing through nineteenth-century Liberalism. And now, his cigarette alight, breakfast was done and democracy was dead.

"The age of political bagmen has been succeeded by the age of political gunmen," said the Baron, after attacking his ham, "the vote-cadging by the 'hands up!' But the human spirit fares no better, and may fare worse if it has no choice but between pinchbeck Napoleons, mountebanks turned brigands, and the Marxian

riff-raff, Jews without God. These last are the more hateful set of the two. I've met some of them, the leaders, not the mere crowd of agitators, and they're really remarkable; inhuman fanatics, monsters of will, slaves of an idea. But the idea's out of Hell, and some of them, mark my words, are ambassadors from the Court of Hell. Did you know the Devil had his representatives here, Mr. Hooby?"

"That is not a notion that had occurred to me, Baron."

"You'll find a list of them in an old book by a Frenchman. I once met one myself, twenty years ago in Valparaiso, a little fellow with a dead white face, who pretended to be an importer of hardware."

Mr. Hooby laid aside his knife and fork and took out a little notebook and pencil. "Now, there's a book I'd be real glad to read," he said, flashing his spectacles, "though I'm no stoodent of the occ-ult. But I'm a stoodent of the human mind, and that book should be a cure-ee-osity. I'd like to have the name of that book, Baron."

"You shall." And the Baron wrinkled his enormous forehead for a moment. "It's called *Les Farfadets*, and the author, who knew all about devils, was Charles Berbiguier de Terre-Neuve du Thym."

Mr. Hooby made an entry in his little notebook, remarking at the same time: "And on another occasion, I'd like to hear from you the story of that little hardware importer of Valparaiso."

"Again, you shall," said the Baron, his nose hinting drollery but the rest of him fixed in solemnity. "I'll make you see that fungus face of his and smell his brimstone, Mr. Hooby. But surely, gentlemen, though you may not have met genuine emissaries from Hell, you've run across creatures here and there, women some of them too, who have at least letters of credit. You've caught the whiff of sulphur, eh? Well, well, you've either been fortunate in your company or not sufficiently discerning. This world shades off into some kind of Heaven and Hell on each side, nothing final, of course, but places filled with the blessed and the damned, and beings who are all either of good or evil will. Their wills master ours, their dreams colour our dreams, and sometimes they themselves come amongst us in the strangest disguises. We don't know who rubs shoulders with us or shakes

us by the hand. A doorway in a side-street might lead you out of what you suppose to be this world altogether, into Hell or Heaven. Two men I know—but there's just time, I think, for another cup of coffee." And he helped himself to coffee, lit a very long black cheroot, and settled back gigantically into his chair, apparently forgetting the two little men he had hung between Heaven and Hell in his hearer's minds.

Templake was the first to dismiss them and to return to the chief subject in hand. "You think, then, Baron," he remarked, "that our strongest argument is not the perfectly just claims of the Stuart line so much as the necessity for returning to monarchic government?" It was clearly not the first time he had achieved this history-book sentence.

The Baron puffed a cloud of smoke at it. "It depends on our company, but for people in general it's certainly the strongest argument. Claims that have not been seriously pressed for over a century lose force. Very few people care about the Stuarts or regard them as anything but picturesque figures in history. Even Mr. Stewart here"—at which Adam presented the six eyes with his blushes—"though he bears the name, has probably never given them a thought. If he has, he probably imagines, like most people, that the members of the present royal house of Bavaria are the heirs, and he has no desire to be ruled by the Bavarians. Even if we could allow, as we have agreed we can't, gentlemen, that the marriage of the Duke of Modena to his niece, Mary, was valid in English law—and the Bavarian claims hang on that, of course—we could do nothing with such claimants, completely foreign as they are, at this late hour. Nobody would look at them. If I had not found proofs of that other line of descent, proofs that I hope to produce before this week is out, and a young English heir, willing to take up his claim, on his way here now to join us, we could have done nothing. Our argument stands on the justice of his claim and the suitability of his person and sympathies, English to the marrow."

He looked at them and Templake murmured and Mr. Hooby nodded their agreement. Adam said nothing, but grappled with the feeling that he was somehow taking part in a vague historical novel.

"I say our argument stands on those things," the Baron resumed,

"but there must be more in it than that. Look at it from the other side. We know that the present monarchy, which is one only in name, will be swept away within this next two years and a republic set up in its place. It is useless attempting to strengthen the existing royal house, because it has deliberately weakened itself, thrown away its prerogatives so that it can't reclaim them. To have a real monarchy, we must begin again, and we can only begin with the Stuarts, who still represent, particularly in Scotland and Ireland, the kingly idea. The old sentiment still exists. But even where it doesn't, where the Stuarts themselves have been forgotten, the idea they represent still exists, for the idea is eternal. It is our only hope left in politics. We can only be saved by a young king from nowhere with a claim as slender and yet as strong as cords of silk. His government would be the exact opposite of all the governments we have to-day or likely to have to-morrow: it would be weak where they are strong, and strong where they are weak. Contrary to all the others, it would be weak as a show of force and strong in its appeal to the imagination. It would have more strength inside men's heads than out, turning a dirty game into poetry. Even if it should succeed, it would still remain for ever a lost cause, because we can never completely translate into actual life the dream of passionate loyalty it creates: the glamorous idea remains, never to be fully realized."

Mr. Hooby, who clearly had all his nation's love of oratorical effort, nodded his head admiringly. Templake broke in shyly with something, but his words never arranged themselves in Adam's mind, for at that moment, with an odd touch of drama, there came the sound of a girl's voice singing. It was Helen, idly carolling as she passed through the hall, and there came floating into them:

I think myself to be as wise
As he that gazeth on the skies. . . .

Templake's speech trailed away and they all stared before them in silence. The voice had come, as apt as incidental music, to reinforce whatever drama was being enacted, but it had come with all the shattering urgency of music and left that drama in pieces, their words and ideas so many dry husks.

Something enigmatic flitted across the Baron's face like a strange

bird across a lighted doorway, and he flung at Adam a most curiously kindling glance. But it was he who broke the tiny spell. "There you have it, gentlemen. What need to say more? One of our old Jacobite ballads, Mr. Hooby. 'When the King Enjoys His Own Again.'" And then, turning to Templake: "Does that mean our fair scouts are setting out?"

Templake nodded. "They are going in Helen's car down the dale as far as Semper, where they can look about them while they lunch, then back, and down the Lobley road, just as we arranged."

The Baron heaved his great bulk out of the chair and stood looking down upon them. "This time they know to look for the——?" And he made a strange sign in the air, which produced an answering nod from Peter's father. "Good!" cried the Baron, "there'll be no more wandering knights brought in, eh, Mr. Stewart? A real king or nothing, what you might call a daylight choice."

Adam stood up, too, and found his voice. "Well, I'm abiding by my moonlit decision," and he made a little bow, aware that the retort, gallant but a little stiff, young-mannish, must be carried off somehow. Then he hastily pulled out his tobacco pouch to show that he was completely at ease, while the Baron lowered his crimson standard of nose as a faintly mocking return, and the other two, out of their depth, stared blankly. They all broke up, Adam turning to the open French windows that looked out upon the morning blaze of lawn.

"Do you know, Templake," came the Baron's voice, now slightly lowered, behind him, "if that Russian girl is with them?"

The other believed that she was not, but resting, idling, hanging about, and was obviously ready to shrug Nina out of existence. Nor could he say, following a further question, who exactly she was. A friend of his daughter's, partner in one of those quick chattering friendships that girls like to build up in a week and destroy some afternoon when they have nothing better to do; only over here on a short visit, from the Continent, France perhaps, certainly not direct from Russia; apparently of good family, abounding in princesses, and of strong royalist sympathies. He knew no more, and clearly cared even less: Nina was not for him. Perhaps Adam reflected a little viciously, she was not a water-colour type.

"A fine-looking girl, that, Baron. A girl you'd notice." This, reflectively, from Mr. Hooby.

"A beautiful bronze, shall we say," replied the Baron, "though not with metal in her veins, whatever there is in her head. But is that all you have to say, Mr. Hooby?"

"Well," and he almost sang it, "well, I'm trying to figure it out. You see, Baron, I've seen that girl before somewhere, but I just can't call to mind where and when it was."

"Ah, you, too!" cried the Baron, and then, lowering his voice, "for I'm certain I've seen her before. And I shall remember where." The door was opened and they passed out, but as they went Adam caught the Baron's voice dying away to a mutter of "And, meanwhile, I think she's better here where we can——." And then it was all tantalizingly lost.

Adam filled his pipe and looked out at the sunlit garden as if it were a vulgar advertisement of something he would never dream of buying. He felt suddenly resentful. Things were taking a wrong turn this morning. Helen and Peter should not have gone off like that, gone off for the whole day; there was something unfriendly in their contriving such an independent existence. Here he was, kicking his heels, while without a word they went off to look for this young unknown with the mysterious sign. It was all nonsense, this dashing about the moorland roads making masonic signs at every chance passer-by. And then all this mysterious fuss about Nina, these nods and winks and enigmatical remarks that might have been lifted out of the nearest cheap *feuilleton*—all nonsense, too! What was the matter with Nina? He patched together from memories of gold hair, bronze-brown eyes and curved parted lips, a wavering but glamorous image of her, and smiled at it with a sudden though not unforced tenderness. She at least had not rushed away to gather some more royal heirs from the roadside, but was still somewhere here, accessible, friendly. He found himself forming an alliance with Nina, now the day's bright promise.

After lighting his pipe, he stood a moment irresolute. More than half the morning was gone already. How should he spend what was left? He moved a sauntering pace or two nearer the open window, but the sound of the door opening behind him brought him to a halt. Turning round he saw the Baron's nose and two

twinkling little eyes looking in at him. "Mr. Stewart," whispered the hoarse voice, "the first door on the left here is that of the library, and behind that door are our friends, Miss Satterly and Mr. Brasure, representing genealogy and genuflexions. They have written and had printed a loyal address to the Highland gentry—we expect some leaders of the clans here later in the week—and are now addressing envelopes in a fine pointed hand. In another moment Miss Satterly will be here to ask for your assistance. There are still six hundred envelopes waiting to be addressed before the afternoon post."

"I write such a vile hand, Baron," said Adam, "that the Highland gentry would never open my envelopes. I'd better disappear."

"Try the road to East Rudge," whispered the head, and then vanished.

Adam walked out by way of the window, turned to his left to be out of range as soon as possible, and then sauntered across the lawn. The morning sunshine, in which the garden was freshly and deliciously bathed, vanquished his ill-humour, already undermined by the little scene, suggesting intimacy, with the Baron, and by his narrow escape from Miss Satterly and her envelopes. Unthinkable to spend this young day's blue and gold, its moorland scent and drifting petals, on envelopes! He drew nearer a figure in white bending over a rose-bush, and out of his restored good humour, sustained by bumpers of vinous air, ventured to throw a cheerful "Good morning!" across the dwindling space of lawn. He then saw that it was Lady Baddeley-Fragge, faintly flushed and happy, with gardening gloves, string and large scissors. She looked less faded as she turned round to return his greeting, smiling vaguely, and Adam, feeling at once easy and stalwart beside her nervous fragility, decided that he liked her. While she busied herself with string and scissors, plainly at home, deft, confident, and loving, in this world of roses, her soul peeping out of her eyes at them, she and Adam agreed that it was a beautiful morning, that it was going to be hot, but not too hot, that they had been fortunate this month with the weather, that this was delightful country. Dull stuff, of course, an exchange of platitudes with a faded lady, but for some obscure reason, Adam, who knew that he was only a shadow, something from an uneasy dream, in that white and crimson sweet-smelling reality of hers,

took pleasure in it all and was in no hurry to be gone.

She had a passion for flowers? A vanished girlhood bloomed again for a second in her cheeks as she admitted that she had. "Somehow," she went on, "they mean more and more every year. Above all, the roses. They're so lovely and—and dependable, and yet so surprising. Sometimes I wonder why they come; and sometimes, in winter, when the days are dark—and we have such long winters here, you know, but somehow I don't care to go abroad as we used to—I wonder if they will ever come again. But here they are, so many of them, so lovely. And yet, next winter, when they have all gone, I shall begin wondering again. It's absurd, of course, but perhaps you understand what I mean, Mr. Stewart?"

Adam eagerly assured her that he did.

Thus emboldened she resumed "I remember once talking like this to Baron Roland. He is a strange man, who says curious things that I cannot understand, and sometimes I think he is merely mocking at everything. But he made a remark then that seemed to me very beautiful, although it may seem to you very stupid and sentimental, for I know what you young people think about such things. He said that my love for the roses was itself a kind of rose, and that perhaps that was how it appeared to God." Shy yet defiant, she looked at him for a moment, then bent again to her flowers with a vague apologetic laugh.

They lapsed into easy commonplaces again and once more Adam became a murmuring shadow. Had he met Mr. Siddell yet?—so polite and efficient, so satisfactory; Sir Arthur was delighted; he had never liked the routine work, the organizing; Mr. Siddell, who had just gone down to East Rudge on some errand, would make all the difference. And had he seen Mrs. Belville? She too had gone in the direction of the village, and some things had arrived for her since she left. Perhaps Adam would be kind enough to walk that way and tell her? Yes, the turn to the right at the front gate. So Adam, not sorry to have some tiny commission, lounged away and carried with him down the long cool drive, with its dark walls of rhododendron, the thought of his hostess, pale, fragile, bending over her blazing flowers. He was pursued by a feeling that the platitudes they had exchanged had bridged the gulf between two planets. There was nothing extra-

ordinary about his hostess, of that he was as sure now as he had been the night before, even though he did feel more kindly towards her; there were thousands of women up and down the country, buried away in gardens like this, who were just like her; but undoubtedly there was something extraordinary about life, which had a trick of growing richer and more disturbing quite suddenly. Look at the way in which people smiled and nodded and talked together and yet were quite unreal to one another, with a strangeness peeping out of their eyes!

He looked at it, not unsteadily for his years and leaping blood, until he reached the front gate where the sunlight was flooding the road. A few paces to the right brought the greater part of the dale into view. The light was still so clear that High Moor and the surrounding fells looked rather small and bare, clean, newly swept; but already a noonday haze was beginning to trouble the bright fields and lower slopes and to add a quivering touch of blue to the heights. A little below him was the green floor of the dale, along which the Runner rippled and winked back at the sunshine. It might have been an outlying arm of Arcadia if it were not for the low grey walls that everywhere took the place of hedges, and a certain suggestion of austerity, unsympathetic to languishing Chloes and Strephons. Yet the road he was on, which ran away a little in front in a most artful tree-framed curve, might have been an Arcadian highway; and it would not be very surprising if the passage of the next corner, beyond the dappled curtain of leaves, landed him in the heart of a pastoral, perhaps in that Arden where they "fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world." He lingered over the quotation, which was a favourite with him, one of those queer fascinating remarks that Shakespeare put into the mouths of all manner of people—was it not the wrestler who had said that about the golden world?—and so contrived to keep you excited about him in spite of all that schoolmasters and professors and bad actors could do to make you lose interest.

The corner turned, it revealed no green foresters or pink and white shepherdesses but the figure of Mrs. Belville, brisk, trim, and cool. She stopped and under the shadow of her wide hat her pale blue eyes snapped at him as fish at flies. He saluted her and presented his little message from Lady Baddeley-Fragge.

"Where did you leave her?" she asked. "In the garden? I

thought so. Did she talk about her flowers? I never knew a woman with such a passion for flowers and with less interest in human beings. Not that a few well-behaved William Allen Richardsons might not be a pleasant change after some of the conspirators she has to provide with board and lodging. I never knew her husband when he was not in some vague and ridiculous conspiracy. He always arrives just before a movement flickers out, and seems to serve as a kind of ornamental extinguisher, poor man! With him, it's a Cause; with his wife, it's flowers; anything but human beings. Not that they're not the kindest sort of people you might meet in a day's journey—but that's how it is in this country. Anything but human beings—causes, flowers, golf-balls, animals."

"I know," said Adam. "Someone once said that England is the country where everyone brightens up at the sight of an animal."

"Who said so, and when?" she asked, with twinkling sharpness. "Ah, I thought so," she went on, as his looks confessed the authorship. "Blushes and epigrams are an ill-assorted pair. But I like you better for trying to pass it off in that fashion. You young men are beginning to make epigrams far too early in life. You will probably end your days with moony rhetoric sowing your wild speeches in the autumn of your lives. It was better the other way about. Making epigrams is one method, perhaps the neatest, of commenting on a large experience of life; but it's not a substitute for that experience, young man. I don't want to see a Rochefoucauld publishing on his twenty-first birthday."

"I promise you that I'm silly enough yet inside," Adam remarked, lightly.

"And I've not a doubt of it," she returned. "How have you spent your morning? Have you begun flirting yet?"

He helped her with: "I never flirt before lunch."

"Nor after dinner, I hope," she said. "If there's to be flirting at all, afternoon is the proper time. Though even then, wisdom suggests a nap instead, or an old-fashioned novel, which you will probably say is the same thing."

"And even if I had wanted to flirt—and I don't admit to having had the slightest desire," he went on, "there's been nobody——" But he stopped short too late.

"A very ungallant remark," cried Mrs. Belville, and seemed

to give him a rap with an invisible fan, "seeing that you have already been in the company of Lady Baddeley-Fragge and myself. Oh yes!—I know what you mean. You mean that my two nieces have gone tearing round the countryside in that car of Helen's, and that Miss Nina has not been visible so far, being occupied in her bedroom smoking cigarettes and over-powdering her nose. But have no fear. You will flirt, or be flirted with, before this day is out, or I am greatly mistaken in our pretty Russian minx. And you have the field to yourself, unless this Mr. Siddell, who seems a pleasant, featureless sort of person—he's down in the village, by the way, you may meet him there—should take to neglecting his duties almost immediately after learning what they are. If you were not here, she would make for one of the others, whatever their age and condition: she would not stop short of Hooby or the Baron."

Adam, who did not altogether relish these observations, put an end to them by asking who Hooby was, and learned that he was one of those rich detached Americans, with neither family nor home, who are now becoming rare and will soon have to be sought out in the pages of Henry James to be encountered at all, men possessed by an almost impersonal curiosity and by little else, without passions and vices, clean, naïve, vaguely benevolent, who take their spectacles and moon faces through the world as if it were one vast museum. "They have only to look hard at anything and become interested in it," Mrs. Belville remarked, "and somehow all the life withers out of it; it is petrified; dead as a door-nail. There's something strangely Gorgonish about them. And now that Mr. Hooby is taking an interest in this great cause, its chance of life is dwindling rapidly; he and Sir Arthur between them will turn it into a little stone monument, I fancy, in less than no time. Not even the Baron can prevent that."

Ah, the Baron! But the Baron was a subject too sumptuous to be the ball in a little roadside game of catch. Let him wait, still with the bloom on him, for an ampler occasion. So, with a casual word about lunch, they parted, Mrs. Belville to the house, Adam in the direction of the village. There was still remaining at least three-quarters of an hour before the first attack on the sideboard began, and as lunch at Runner House was an informal meal, that period could be stretched, if necessary, to suit one's mood and

circumstances. Adam felt inclined to give himself an hour's lounging along this Arcadian highway, during which time, if the noonday pattern of sunlight and shadow, and all the pleasures of hedgerows and sweet dust, permitted such inward searchings, he might go through the newly-stocked cupboards and shelves of his mind, and taste, tidy, classify the things that experience, whose vans had come clattering up every minute or so these last twelve waking hours, had left with him.

Two more turns of the road brought the village in sight, a grey huddle of roofs among trees, and before it a quarter-mile stretch of straight road that mounted slightly to the bridge over the Runner, which curved round this side of East Rudge. As he walked forward, the sight of two figures on the bridge, obviously talking together, gradually absorbed his attention. One of them, he was more confident with every step he took, was Siddell, whose tall tall slight figure and Donegal tweeds were not hard to recognize. The other looked like an elderly rustic, and yet, even at that distance, there was something oddly familiar about his figure, although Adam had no acquaintances among the elderly rustics in these parts. Still, he had been here before, and memory is for ever troubling our eyes.

Then he saw Siddell leave his companion sitting on the low parapet and stride up the road towards him. Some instinct made him increase his own pace, and a minute later he and Siddell were within hailing distance of one another. The latter smiled and waved his hand: "Coming back to lunch?" he cried. "It's nearly time, I believe."

Adam suddenly decided that he was not, not yet. "No, thanks. I thought I'd just go as far as the bridge there, to see my old friend, the Runner."

"The Run——ah, I see! The river." Siddell laughed heartily, too heartily, at himself, and went on, quickly: "I've just been standing on the bridge there, talking to one of the local characters. No doubt you saw me. A quaint fellow. They've got a dry humour in these parts. So long!" And he moved off, at a smart pace.

The quaint fellow was still sitting on the parapet, and every moment there seemed something more curiously familiar about him. Adam walked forward, determined to have a peep at this

local character who could take up the time of the brisk and business-like organizing secretary, who could remain so long in one's memory from some casual encounter that his figure seemed familiar at a distance. As he neared the bridge, however, he dropped back into a saunter, stopped when he had lounged up to it, looked at the shining water and then at his watch, threw a quick careless glance at the man sitting there and said, in the casual but affable manner of the tourist bent on rural civilities, "Good morning!" The merest flicker of a gleam of triumph lit up the man's eyes. "Marnin' to 'ee, zur," he said, with all the effrontery of a bad actor, and then shambled down the road towards the village.

All Adam's thoughts went dancing and winking with the river. Hake, of course! The Inspector once more! Two hundred and fifty miles out, at least, in his accent, and completely, pathetically, ineffectual in a grey false beard and property hat, scarf and coat. There he was, going down the road, aglow with the thought that his pitiful disguise, his downright impudent "Marnin' to 'ee," had been successful, when all the time he had been just as plainly Inspector Hake as he was in the train or the inn. And this was Siddell's "local character," with all the dry humour of the district! But was it, though? Was Siddell very foolish or very cunning? Retracing his steps, Adam carried back with him to lunch a load of queries almost as masterful as his appetite.

CHAPTER SIX

THE ORCHARD

Open windows, streaming sunlight, and an easy informality gave lunch at first the air of a picnic. Sir Arthur, Templake and the Baron were missing throughout, and so, of course, were Helen and Peter, but all the other members of the party were there. The picnic air served its turn in encouraging Adam's not unwilling appetite, but it soon gave place to a feeling of unreality. Every morsel of food, from the first mouthful of salad to the last crumb of cheese, and the shining ale in his glass were real enough; but there was about everything else there, the scene and the persons in it, a curious suggestion of the theatre. As he watched the successive entrances of his fellow guests, who seemed to pause before making their opening remark as if to give time for a little round of applause; or he stared at the steady blaze of sunshine, golden enough for any producer, the bright crockery and the dark panelled walls; he could not resist the fancy that he was assisting at the first act of a comedy. At one moment he felt like an actor, waiting for unknown cues; at another, and this more frequently, he was a member of the audience who had seen the play before but could not remember what was coming next. The result was that he made no attempt to answer the questions that had pursued him along the road, but looked idly at Siddell, smiling there between Lady Baddeley-Fragge and Mrs. Belville, as if he were some minor player. Such questions now seemed without force and urgency, being merely part of a mechanical "plot" that would settle itself. He could afford to disregard such an affair of strings and pulleys: the drama, if there was to be a drama, would be something very different, far more personal, warm, secret. It would evolve without help from him, and for the moment he was content to look on drearily while he enjoyed most untheatrical viands.

Nina was there, in full bloom yet delicately tawny, looking as if she had just been created that morning. She could hardly have

desired a better setting; in that company she was pure flame among sullen ashes, the flesh in flower, exotic, too, and all the more exotic because of her alien fairness, fetched from some garden far away, behind strange mountains. Once or twice her eyes met his and for a second or so he was lost in their golden mystery, but the smiles they exchanged brought to him no sense of real personal communication. Invisible footlights ran across the luncheon table. He was only seated in a front stall, catching her glowing glances as an object catches a turning ray of light. Nor did he resent the fact; it was enough that there was a lovely young leading lady; he had little desire for real communication with anyone, less and less as the meal went forward; and only asked that the scene should go meandering on, idly pleasuring his eyes. He even took pride in his detachment, which seemed to him evidence, not of an oncoming drowsiness, born of a hearty lunch and a hot afternoon, but of the truly philosophic mind.

Meanwhile there was a dialogue, in which he took part as one throwing up an occasional word from the auditorium. Major Storching, who had stolidly marched with him through the meal, had contrived to articulate a question concerning one Colonel Stewart, old "Tubby" Stewart of the Fifty-Second. Was Adam related to "Tubby?" There was some resemblance. Adam, who always resented these resemblances and was positive that he was totally unlike any old colonel who merited such an epithet, swiftly repudiated "Tubby."

"And I'm very glad, indeed, that you're not related to him, Mr. Stewart," remarked Lady Matchways, who was delicately consuming a square inch or so of chicken on the other side, "because I never liked Colonel Stewart. A brutal imperialist of the worst kind. It was he, Major, who made that scene in my house with Isram, who was staying with me at the time. Poor Isram! He was shot afterwards; at Baku, I think it was. Yes, it was at Baku, I remember now, because Bolusky told me. Bolusky managed to escape and came to stay with me shortly afterwards."

Mrs. Belville leaned forward. "Which one was that?" she asked. "Wasn't that the dreadful hairy, smelly one who spoilt your Aubusson?"

Lady Matchways smiled reminiscently. "Yes, dear. I remember how you hated him, and were so frightened that evening when he

cried and set fire to the curtains. Something to do with God, I think it was. Poor Bolusky was always so concerned about God. He could never either believe or disbelieve long, and was always so excited one way or the other, I can't remember which, when he was drunk. And he was drunk so often. It was whisky, I think, that upset him. He had never had any before, and liked it so much that he drank two bottles the very first evening. My husband, I remember, always disliked Bolusky most of all. His manners were certainly rather dreadful and he was rather smelly, but he had a beautiful unspoilt nature, quite childlike, and was a great worker. He disappeared afterwards, and we never heard definitely what became of him, though Olgoff, who came to us to hide after the Bulgarian affair, said that he had seen him in Bucharest, where he was living in a back room at a baker's. I think it was a baker's, though it may have been a butcher's. It's all so long ago. Why, you were only a girl at the time, my dear. I remember you came with your mother on that evening when Bolusky was with us."

"Yes, I was completing my education," remarked Mrs. Belville.

"You were beginning it," said Lady Matchways, looking more frail and indomitable than ever; and then went on: "Olgoff was certainly a pleasanter person to have in the house; his manners were charming; but he was deplorably weak, and I have always doubted whether he really did carry through the Bulgarian affair himself as he pretended. Both Steck and Berstin—you never met him, I think; a wonderful man; he was sent to Devil's Island—refused to believe that he did. I'm so sorry you never met Berstin—the Baron will remember him, I think—for he was always my favourite, and I have always regretted that I could not carry out my project of fitting out a ship to rescue him. I had everything planned, but we waited and waited, and heard at last that he had died after a year or two in that awful place. We had nobody like him, so thorough and resourceful, and with such an air. If he had not been at hand we should never have got our old Camden Town headquarters clear before the raid. We had only a few hours to move everything; indeed we were lucky to have any time at all, but old Mr. Malony, who kept a little tobacconist's shop near *The Man in the Moon*, where the detectives go knew everything and never failed us. Well, Berstin and I—if you will allow an old woman to boast—Berstin and I did it all. He got the explosives away under

some apples and sacks on a greengrocer's cart, and I saw to the little press and the papers with the help of a donkey and cart."

"Lady Matchways," Mr. Hooby called out, gravely, with the air of one about to present a prize, "you've had a singularly roam-antic career. As I said last night, you should set down your experiences in a book. It would be a chapter of history and a roam-ance, and there would be a big call for it this side and, I promise you, in America."

"And as I also said last night, Mr. Hooby," returned the old lady with decision, "no memoirs for me. I still know too many secrets. But I flatter myself that I've fought for freedom, and I've enjoyed myself immensely. And now I'm helping to put a king on the throne, turning royalist in my old age. Dear me, how the comrades of the old movement would stare if they knew. Madame Mashvays—for that is the nearest they ever got, poor dears, to pronouncing my name—Madame Mashvays a royalist! But if the spirit is to remain the same, I always think the movement itself must change, for different remedies must be tried against the old evil. Remember that, Mr. Stewart, and if you find yourself in fifty years' time still in this camp, depend upon it that the spirit in you will have changed altogether. No, no more, thank you. I've made an excellent lunch." A sparrow would have waited for more, but she clasped her hands, nodded amiably to her hostess, smiled with a sudden tenderness at Nina like any old lady at any pretty young thing, and closed the eyes that still illuminated that worn and fragile face.

Adam felt as if he had been dozing over an old-fashioned sensational story, merely catching here and there an odd name, a scrap of incident; but looking across now at the delicate aged figure, a sudden wonder took possession of his mind. And this feeling was so strong that it touched with fantasy every person present, the very dullest of them taking colour from it. Because the mild rambling voice of that old lady had conjured up in his mind so many vague but terrific images, knives flashing in the Balkans, bearded faces bending over bombs, carts loaded with terror creaking down dark side-streets; the other persons there, commonplace though they might appear when contrasted with this fantastic grandmother, did not lose but gained in significance. How strange, beautiful yet terrifying, it all was! He felt like a mouse with the colossally heaped table of life groaning far above

him. Round that salad-bowl, nine gigantic Odysseys had come to rest; nay, were still clicking on, still piling up incident and laying on the colours of joy and sorrow and dream. There radiated from every person there fantastic and interminable processions, jostling troupes of memories, trailing back into Heaven only knew what places and dusty old years. And all of them, as they sat so easily there, were taking their stations in these pageants and would move along with the rest; all quite different; eight different Adam Stewarts already set marching along eight different roads of remembrance. Stealthily, as if they might know what he was about and suddenly scream out at his rude prying, he glanced at the dullest faces there, and marvelled. What night marches and peering hill-men were hidden behind the wooden countenance of the Major! Who knew what visions of embroidered Heaven and a red twisting Hell burned in that space behind the shallow front of the Reverend Philip; what young princes came smiling from the sea, and what dark clans went swirling down to death behind the faded eyes of Miss Satterly!

And then as suddenly as it came, this feeling of wonder vanished, leaving him spent in sympathy, a little drowsy and discontented. His one desire, now that they were breaking up, was to escape, to be alone for an hour or two. He would sneak away somewhere with a book and a pipe. But that might be difficult, for if there was work to be done and he was asked to lend a hand, it would be impossible to refuse; the least he could do, interloper that he was, was to justify his presence there by a few tasks willingly undertaken. Fortunately, the more energetic and influential members of the party, he fancied, were all absent. He had no scruples about evading the envelope-addressing pair, who had that appearance of sombre righteousness which suggested that there were at least another two hours of drudgery awaiting them. Already they were whispering together and looking about them, not without a glance in his direction, and in another moment he might find himself doomed to spend the rest of the afternoon with a pile of stationery and the directory of Ross and Cromarty, with the further prospect of an hour in Caithness after tea. He fled upstairs to his room, where he decided to remain, with *Harry Richmond* for company, until all danger was past. Settling himself near the open window on two chairs, he plunged into that midnight in

which Richmond Roy claims his son, but not without affronting that glorious chapter by an occasional rub of the eyes; and no sooner had father and son gone down the road than he lost them completely, being stunned rather than wooed into sleep by the strong air, lunch, and the murmurous hot afternoon.

When he struggled back again into full consciousness, feeling at first detached from his heavy cramped lump of body, just a shivering peering little ghost suddenly hustled into the great golden afternoon, his watch told him that it was half-past three. He looked at it suspiciously, not because he could not believe that he had been asleep for an hour, but simply because, having slipped away from everything for a little space, he wondered what things had been up to during his absence. He did not trust them all at once: these big holes in the afternoon were rare and still left him suspicious. Undoubtedly it was half-past three in the garden below, now buried in a deep peace, though its trees shimmered in the heat and its banks of flowers seemed to smoulder. Still shivering a little, he stood for some minutes looking down, warming himself at the sight of it and returning sensuously to life. He would go down into the garden and smoke and dream in the shade over a book. But first, a cool splashy kind of wash, a change of collar and one minute with a brush and comb, offered themselves.

Clean, brushed, very much alive in body though still dreamy in mind, he descended into the sunlight and felt as if he were at last entering that golden world where time can be fleeted. The very feel of the lawn under his feet gave him a rare sensuous pleasure; sun and shadow played round his uncovered head; the massed flowers feasted his eyes: the garden, the blue and golden spaces, the whole superb afternoon, spread themselves before him, with an infinity of delicate revelation, like a bride. His steps lost their first briskness for a languor stole over him, as if some sweet exhalation from the heavy red roses had passed into his blood. After crossing the lawn, he loitered among the flower-beds, explored the rose-garden beyond, and then noticed that behind the laurel hedge on one side there was an orchard. The right place had come to join the right time. An orchard, of course, was just what he was wanting. He sauntered round the hedge, which had hidden the lower part of the trees and the ground from his sight,

and then, when he had actually entered the orchard, his heart suddenly leaped to tell him what his mind had refused to admit to itself, that something else had been joined to the right time and place. There was someone, a girl—it could only be Nina—lying there under the apple-trees.

But all he could see was a hammock slung between two trees, and hanging over the near side of this hammock, roundly catching the light and at once becoming the focus of the scene, a leg. The world is now full of legs and even he who runs may read what tricks Nature has played between the feminine ankle and knee. Adam had grown to manhood among legs and was of a generation that could take them for granted, look them over casually. Young womanhood to him was essentially a leggy affair, whose entrances and exits were inseparable from two flesh-coloured cylinders, gleaming shins, variously and wonderfully-shaped calves. But this leg, delicately rounded in the sunlight, as if it were some strange silky kind of fruit ripening there, was different. It caught and held his eye, enchanted his imagination. Its lovely curves, sweeping from ankle to knee, were meshed in an exquisite light tan-coloured silk, and they suggested something at once delicate and strong, as soft and fragile as a butterfly's wing and yet as fertile and as indestructible as the earth itself, that something which is perhaps the grand secret of physical woman and makes her Nature's most astonishing and charming paradox.

While he stood there for a moment staring, half lost in a faintly voluptuous dream, a rounded white arm swung over the side of the hammock to complete the picture of graceful abandon. He walked forward through the long grass, whistling as he went so that the girl in the hammock, Nina undoubtedly, would know that someone was there. And Nina it was who presently peeped up at him and smiled back his greeting, a lazy, sleepy Nina, more golden than ever and more alluring in her slight disarray, with flushed cheeks and tangled hair. In a few moments she was wide awake. No, she did not mind being disturbed—and here she spoke truth for she was manifestly glad to see him—for she had just come to the end of a tiny siesta. He must sit down beside her and talk, and meanwhile she would beg a cigarette. In exchange for the cigarette she handed him two cushions which he placed very close to the hammock and then seated himself upon them tailor-fashion. She

held the cigarette in her mouth with her hand and leaned forward for a light, and as she was certain to be rather unsteady in that position, it was necessary that his hand, holding the match, should come in contact with hers. And then when their hands fell apart and they leaned back to let an occasional dribble of smoke escape from their mouths, their eyes still lingered as if they did not know that the little flame that the match had lighted between them had served its purpose and was now extinguished. Really it was lovely in the orchard; a perfect afternoon and the perfect place in which to enjoy it. They both, it seemed, agreed about this.

"You think it is safe for you here? Yes?" she asked with a rising inflection.

There were at least fifteen replies to this, but Adam, thinking it wiser to let his companion, who seemed to have the tuning-fork ready, set the pitch of their duet, contented himself with a "Why not?"

"Your name? Is it not Adam?" she pursued, accenting the second syllable of his name a little more than the first and giving it a piquancy in his ears. And then, after he had nodded, she went on: "The first of men?"

"The very first," said Adam gravely. "He lived in Eden but was afterwards driven out, to work."

"And these?" She waved a hand towards the trees above their heads.

"Apple trees without a doubt. Perhaps that very Eden pippin." And Adam let his chin droop into his collar and looked up at her in mock dismay.

She wagged a forefinger. "And you think it safe for you? But the fruit, it is not yet—what do you say?—*mûr*, in maturity?"

"No," said Adam, "it's not ripe yet." But his eyes, still fixed upon her face, held no vision of green sour fruit.

"That is it. Not r—ripe," she exclaimed, trilling deliciously. "Then perhaps it is alright." There was the whole Continent, gesticulating its way through Anglo-Saxon, in that "alright." But Adam was charmed and smiled back at her as if they had just exchanged a dozen glittering passes of wit. This sense of being charmed, however, only floated on the surface of a fast-flowing current of excitement, a drumming tide of blood, into which the wine of the afternoon had already been poured. But they them-

selves were both floating together down some rapid stream, every glance and smile marking another league they had travelled, rushing towards some intimacy and yet remaining strange to one another, this very strangeness hurrying them forward. The fact that she herself was foreign, that this beauty of face, with its bright eyes and generous flashing mouth, this beauty of rounded limb, had grown up so far away and had travelled through all manner of fantastic places, completed the enchantment of the situation, transformed the two cushions on which he was sitting into a magic carpet and every word and smile he exchanged into a high adventure. All girls, at least all pretty ones, when you came to think of it, were strange and seemed at first to stare at you out of another world; but as soon as you knew them they were for ever collapsing into the commonplace. Here, however, so close to him, was one who was genuinely strange, whose very commonplace would be something fantastically alien, something Russian, half a bright toy and half a tragedy.

Thinking of her thus, he saw every possibility of communication between them, let alone warm intimacy, as a happy miracle. He suddenly wanted to seize the little hand that hung over the side of the hammock and was not more than eighteen inches from his own. An answering pressure from it would be like a "Land Ho!" from a look-out after long weeks of sea and sky. Fascinated by this idea, he stared at the hand and noticed that it had trim but rather long pointed pink nails, two dimples, and a ring on the middle finger.

"Do you look at my ring?" asked Nina. "It is very curious, very, very old. Look." And she extended her hand, perhaps in order that he might be able to see the ring more closely. Under pretence of wishing to examine it very closely and steadily, he took her hand lightly but firmly in his. And there it remained, to his delight, while she resumed: "You see there—what has Peter called it?—yes, the coat-of-arms, the aigle and daggair. I will tell you." And tell him she did: a long rambling story that had for her a superhumanly handsome and brave Georgian prince, killed at last by the Bolsheviks, and for heroine herself, with whom he was apparently in love; but what their relations were the recital did not indicate, though there was every suggestion that they lacked nothing in intimacy. This ring, of course, had been given to her

by the prince, who, strangely enough, was not unlike Adam although, he gathered, an altogether superior being. Adam had every appearance of listening very closely to this chapter of reminiscence, this incoherent romance in which incredible persons and places floated as in a dream, but though he by no means lacked curiosity, he was indeed only playing at listening. Even if he had been offered the neatest of narratives, it would not have had anything like all his attention at that moment, for this holding of her hand was the supreme reality, completing as it did a circuit between them, and there it was that his mind fluttered.

She came to the end of her recital. Her voice trailed away; her mouth was a drooping red flower, her eyes desolate brown pools; she sighed. "How extraordinary!" Adam exclaimed, and stared very fiercely at the ring and then a little mournfully at its owner, adding "I'm so sorry, Nina," though he was not at all sure for what he was sorry. But he gently squeezed the hand he held before disengaging it, and their fingers seemed to part reluctantly. Inwardly he was exultant. What came next?—what unknown rivers and forests, what temples in the jungle, what Cities of the Sun!

He offered his cigarette case and lit up after her, for this, he felt in his bones, might be a moment for tobacco but was certainly not meant for a pipe. Then, with a pitying thought for all the tailors of this world, he changed his position, throwing himself out at full length, though with his knees off the ground, towards and underneath the hammock, resting his right elbow on a cushion and his head on his right hand. Opening another chapter of reminiscence with a demand to know whether he had ever met a certain Marquis de Bel Amadou, Nina also shifted her posture, settling her head on her left arm, throwing out her right arm behind her to balance herself and then swinging out her legs on his side of the hammock. One of them apparently came to rest against his, for he could feel a light touch there, but he had not the courage to take his eyes off her face so that he might look and make sure. The Marquis de Bel Amadou, known to his intimates as "Viki," was, it appeared, not unworthy of taking a place beside the Georgian prince, for he was a very dashing handsome fellow—and, curiously enough, not unlike Adam—rich, masterful, and of a fascination, imagine to yourself. As her memories crowded upon her, Nina's English

gradually broke under the strain, and even if he had been giving her reminiscences all the attention he pretended, it is doubtful if he could have made of them anything coherent. Other figures, many of them not unlike Adam himself but, you will understand, of a superior richness and fascination, joined the Marquis in this shadow show, whose background was now Paris, now Vienna, now Monte Carlo; but at the best he could only see the delightful face before him moving through a vague but very rapid film of cosmopolitan adventures in love It needed a sugary orchestra, velvet stalls, and the warm, sensuous atmosphere of the picture house to complete this frilly and scented epic of hers.

As before, however, his mind was really elsewhere, hovering round that absurd contact, which was now more apparent than ever, almost a firm pressure, though still not to be glanced at, and which kept him from changing his position again. It was ridiculous of course, a mere touch that might be purely accidental, but it afforded him great satisfaction. Not that it gave him any sensuous pleasure, but it suggested an idea of intimate communication that made their talk so much elaborate pretence. Had it not been for that little pressure on his leg, the talk, with its imposing names and places, its background of alien magnificence, would have left him crushed. As it was, this touch more than enabled him to hold his own; it made him the equal, if not the superior, of these rich and passionate Marquises; it presented him with the freedom of Monte Carlo and Vienna. Enriched by this casually scattered largesse, he suddenly felt that he adored Nina and was possessed by a desire to kiss her.

Meanwhile the afternoon was floating by like a great golden galleon. He glanced at his watch and discovered that it was after five. The last thing he wanted was to break up their little party now, but something must be said about tea. She was looking at him interrogatively.

"It's after five," he remarked. "Would you like me to bring some tea out here?"

"No, no, thank you," she replied, to his relief. "For me it does not matter. The tea is not good here. But for you—perhaps you would like to go?"

Undoubtedly she was adorable. He smiled at her with genuine enthusiasm. "No. I'd rather stay here listening to you, and

looking at you, than do anything else in the world. Even though, you know, it may not be very safe for me." Easy enough, though he was annoyed to find that his voice was trembling a little. She smiled and made round, bright eyes at him, at the same time settling herself at full length again in the hammock.

"And after all," he went on, "it's not very safe for you—in this." And he waved towards the hammock.

"Why not?" She was all wide-eyed innocence.

"Because these things go over so easily." There was the least suggestion of a gasp in his voice. "One touch, you know, and you might easily be out." As if in illustration, he gave a little push to the hammock and Nina returned a little scream and flung her arms round his neck. Their faces came together; her lips parted and heavy white lids closed over those great golden eyes; his arm shot round her and then, mouth to mouth, as they flashed together over the rapids and through purple scented air, they kissed.

That marked a period; it was as if the afternoon, hitherto drowsing behind their back, had suddenly struck a gong. The kiss at end, they each drew a deep breath. Their eyes still clung together, but not without queries. What now? Recovery, as usual, was difficult, for if you are not parting then the only sensible progress from a kiss, a real one and not a mere pecking of the time of day, is towards other kisses or at least a supporting diminuendo of caresses. Adam was ready for more and was equally ready to pretend that nothing had happened, but anything between these extreme courses was beyond him. It was, as usual, the lady who recovered first and turned the corner for them both.

"You see, it is not so very safe for you," she said. "Though that you make for yourself. I think you are—flirrt, yes, a flirrt. But perhaps you think me very charming, beautiful? Perhaps with you it is *le coup de foudre?*"

But Adam was not yet quite round the corner. Strange, the way they did it. It must be the insensitiveness of the sex that enabled them to take the lead on these occasions. And now, faced with these questions, to which he was quite ready in his mind to give a liberal assent, he felt a fool. They hung weights on his tongue, which contrived, however, after some stumbling, to articulate that he adored her and had adored her ever since he had first seen her on the platform of St. Pancras. He even went on,

now that his tongue was loosened, to examine and praise her various features, and all these tributes to her beauty and charm she accepted admirably, without embarrassment but with just the proper suggestion of surprise.

But oh, yes! she herself had noticed him in the railway station, she told him with engaging frankness. It was the resemblance to more than one of her dear friends that had attracted her attention. Perhaps he was the type she admired. And here the Georgian prince and "Viki" and one or two others crossed the stage again, but this time, he felt, so that he might give them a condescending nod. There really were resemblances. Remarkable! She had photographs, yes, there in her room, and he must see them and compare himself with them in the mirror. "But not, you will understand, with the others there," she added. "This is our own affair, is it not?"

"It is," Adam replied heartily. "You could, of course, give them to me after dinner. But the glass in my room is very small, not worthy of such an experiment. It's a very small room, you know."

"Where is it, this room?" she asked, after a tiny but by no means idle interval of silence. And then, when he had described its position, at the end of the corridor to the left on the first floor, she cried: "What coincidence! There is where I am also. Next to you. Mrs. Belville, she is on the other side, and the others are above. Perhaps if—but, of course, no." She looked across at her feet, and a ray of sunlight came through the leaves to light up her faintly fluttering eyelashes, the downy curve of her cheek, her vivid white throat. The garden behind them must be filled with birds, singing on, as they were singing now, until the moon climbed up the sky. And who would have thought that grass could smell so sweet!

Ever so gently, he took the hand so near his own, and ran his thumb up and down the little yielding fingers. "That all depends, of course, on whether there's a good mirror, a large true mirror, in your room," he said softly, convinced that the Marquis himself, nay, the ripest eighteenth-century Bel Amadou, could not have done better. Without thinking, he leaned forward and gave the hand he was holding a little tug, so that Nina once more swung forward and threw her other arm about his neck. For a few moments her cheek, miraculously cool, was lightly pressed against

his, and then slowly their faces turned until mouth clung to mouth and once more they kissed.

This time she disengaged herself quite briskly, rose to her feet and waited for him to join her. He picked up the cushions and they walked slowly up the orchard towards the garden. A step or two from the laurel hedge, she halted, looked gravely at him, and then, when he looked gravely in return, suddenly smiled, swiftly, bewilderingly, deliciously, and said: "There is a very good mirror there. But listen!—I am not certain. I will see. If I think you may come, then I will knock, so, on my wall, to-night. Then you may come, *doucement*, *sur la pointe des pieds*. But if no knock, then no, you must stay where you are. You understand, Monsieur Ad-am?" He understood. The night, even now gathering up its beauties, polishing its moon, spraying its honeysuckle, trying over its singing birds, somewhere behind the bright curtain of the afternoon, was to be hung upon a knock.

They skirted the laurel hedge, walked past those roses that had come blossoming from the darkness yet once again for Lady Baddeley-Fragge, and came in view of the house, that house of king-makers. It had not changed at all, except perhaps that it looked a trifle more foolish and old, turning a dim-sighted gaze, you felt, upon its own orchard, and probably past hearing a little knocking in the night.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ARGONAUTS

DESCENDING for dinner, Adam found the house steeped in an atmosphere of conspiracy, and somehow not very successful conspiracy. The Baron was still absent, and nobody present seemed to have any straightforward questions to ask or any definite information to give. Eyebrows were raised, whispers were exchanged in corners; the drawing-room and the hall were shadowy with vague news; everybody floated about on a tide of rumour. There were, of course exceptions. Mrs. Belville moved serenely from one group of whisperers to another, commenting briskly on all things under the sun in a voice and manner that made everything else there seem more shadowy than ever. She cocked a cool indulgent eye here and there, not unlike an adult visitor at a children's fancy-dress party. Lady Baddeley-Fragge busied herself arranging great bowls of flowers, which she petted and soothed as if it were they who were waiting for the dinner-gong; but now and then she would turn to her guests to give them, as it were, a cursory sniff and pat. Adam felt that he was being shown to her roses as a fairly promising young male, newly gathered, who, if properly watered and fed, might keep fresh for another ten years: he was sure they were staring at him.

Helen and Peter had not returned, and it was probably for news of them that everybody was secretly gaping. It was said that they would not be back for at least two hours, and there was so much vague talk that Adam, who felt that he had lost sight of them ages ago, could no longer think of them as two pretty girls but only as two mysterious messengers, instruments of Destiny, their heads cloudy with rumour. Compared with them, Nina, whom he had not yet seen since they left the garden together, was for all her fascinating strangeness an intensely real person, someone he had known for years. It was this king-chasing that made all the difference, spreading a hollow feeling of unreality. The whole

thing was still incredible. When you came to think of it, this was a terrific historic occasion, which might change the whole history of Europe; you were waiting for an unknown king. The trouble was, however, that you could only tell yourself that it was, or might be, momentous; and it was difficult not to believe that what you were really waiting for was the dinner-gong. Refusing to be bullied into a state of excited wonder by a possible future historian, Adam conjured up a defiant interest in the common stuff of existence, the mere life-went-on, about which that historian would know nothing. Only it was not common stuff any longer; it was pulsating, radiant with changing colour. But was it? Well, not here and now perhaps, but certainly just round the corner, last night, this coming night, to-morrow. That was the wonder of this adventure; no more common stuff of life; all of it left behind, a rotting mound, in St. Pancras Station.

It was not his part, as a polite newcomer, to look too conspiratorial, but the least he could do was to steep himself in the atmosphere, help to thicken it; so he tip-toed round, raised his eyebrows, and whispered with the rest. From Mr. Brasure he tried to gather some idea of the lineage of this English descendant of the Stuarts, but that gentleman, jaded after the barren leagues of Caithness, either could not or would not tell him, and what was worse, really exasperating, tried to be jolly about it, as if Adam were a midday service for business men. While they were talking, Siddell, tall, sleek, passed them with a nod and the ghost of a smile, a curiously knowing little ghost, too. There was something odd about this Siddell, whose self-effacing manner sometimes seemed queerly mixed with an almost mocking assurance. Now and then it appeared as if he deliberately thrust upon you that bleached surface personality of his, those faintly pencilled brows and pale polite eyes, as a conjurer hands round his hat or raps his table, secure in the knowledge that his sleeve is full of ribbons and cards. It might be, of course, merely his manner as the only paid servant of the cause, that touch of irony sometimes to be found in the deft gestures and deferential voices of butlers and waiters. But how could he have been so completely deceived by the incredible Hake, whose rural disguise, in which he obviously delighted for its own sake, was so ineffectual that it became almost wistful, pathetic? Siddell might be ass enough to be taken in, yet

there was something about him, a confident ring in the sound of his footfalls, a mocking gleam somewhere, that suggested he was not. Was it not high time he told somebody, the Baron perhaps, about that Hake episode?

He had no sooner asked himself the question than the Baron, huge and smiling, entered the drawing-room, and immediately the atmosphere lightened and a kind of dawn broke round his nose. His little eyes went twinkling over the assembly and his hoarse voice fell upon their ears like a benediction. In his presence the whole conspiracy became once more gay and, somehow, credible: undoubtedly he was the big fat heart of the thing. "We move, we move!" he cried. "More assurances of support to-day. Some clan leaders arrive the day after to-morrow. We may expect his Highness any time now. Our two scouts have not yet come across him, which is as well seeing that they have been watched, but they have heard something. And I know definitely now that he has left for the north and that so far he has contrived to outwit an escort of secret service men. Yes, he has been shadowed; it's useless making any mystery about that. They are after him, and they are watching us. At last, it seems, we are dangerous; and every counter-move, every spy, is a compliment."

At that moment a slight noise at the door behind made him, and those, like Adam, who were looking towards him, turn round. There, standing at the door, exquisite in sea-green, was Nina. Adam caught his breath. She did not look at him, however, but across at the Baron, who stared back at her as he repeated, though without any special emphasis: "Yes, every spy is a compliment, though not, of course, any the less dangerous for being that, as you, Miss Bersieneff, will understand." Hitherto rigid, she now made a sudden gesture, but the Baron went on quickly: "I mean, of course, as a connoisseur of compliments, and well-deserved ones too, eh, Mr. Stewart?" Nina accepted this with a slight smile but an unsoftened eye; and Adam's perfunctory "Quite" left him time to consider the odd little scene, which was not without a hint of melodrama.

As they went into dinner, he could not help wondering why these two should seem to dislike each other. Surely the Baron did not think that Nina was a spy, one of those mysterious beautiful spies, flitting between Bucharest and Barcelona, who were always

purloining somebody's "papers" in the old sensational novels. When he sat down, with Mrs. Belville on one side of him and her brother, Geoffrey Templake, on the other, Adam looked across at Nina, who was sitting between Hooby and the Major at the other side of the table, and saluted her with his eyes, saluted the girl herself and, if need be, Barcelona, Bucharest, papers and all. Her eyes answered his, swiftly, surely, withering away the space between them, turning speech itself into a clumsy tedious communion, no longer to be sighed for; her glance was at once an innermost secret revealed and a caress; they seemed to kiss across the table. That was what was so miraculous about Nina, for under cover of the mere empty barter of words, or without words at all, she led you on, took you by the hand, while before you paths opened out through apparently impenetrable jungles, and shining cities unbolted all their gates. His heart warm with this secret intimacy, his pride mounting high, he looked at her, and as he looked, he felt that only they were alive and that all the others there were so many stuffed dummies nodding and staring and flopping through some kind of hollow show. No, not all, for the Baron, towering beside their hostess, was still alive; and for all his strange antagonism to Nina, the only stupid thing about him, he shared her vitality and glamour, and there seemed to run between them some curious linking thread. Adam felt that in some obscure fashion the presence of both of them there was inevitable, that you could not have one without the other; and then told himself, though without attaining conviction, that it was all a mere matter of association in his mind. He looked again at Nina, received once more her flashing golden glance, and then heard from far away, somewhere at the back of his mind, a tiny knocking on a wall. He had tried not to think of that knocking, which may have been going on there ever since he left the orchard; but now it was not to be dismissed. He saw the evening in front of him, swollen, monstrous, slowly dropping minutes like lumps of lead, hundreds of them, before life began again with a knock.

"I hope, Geoffrey," Mrs. Belville was saying to her brother, "the girls have not drawn down the wrath of Scotland Yard upon themselves. They may be locked up now in a village tap-room, as Adam Stewart here was, last night." Adam paid no attention to Templake's vague assurance that all was well and the girls were

returning, for that casual mention of last night suddenly filled him with wonder. Last night! Last year it seemed, for this very day went stretching back in his memory, a procession winding over hills, like a round dozen of common weeks. But Mrs. Belville was talking to him.

"What were these detective persons like? Bullies? Or amiable, like comfortable fat policemen?" She posed the questions sharply, as if to rebuke him for his lack of attention. He made haste to reply that the two he had met were not unamiable, and went on to describe Inspector Hake. "I saw him this morning," he concluded, with an easy air, "and pretended not to know him. He was hanging about near the village, disguised as a rustic."

"Disguised as a rustic?" she repeated. "Are you serious?"

"Quite," Adam returned. "He had false whiskers and a stage Wessex accent that would have been quite unconvincing even if he had not been at least two hundred miles out of his way."

"False whiskers again!" She made a swift appeal with her eyes and shoulders to some heaven of sweet reason. "What is the matter with everybody. Is it the heat? Why, this Inspector is as ridiculous as the Baron, who says that he only ordered all thoes whiskers to please Lady Matchways, but really got them because he liked them. At any moment he may persuade all the men to wear them. As for Lady Matchways, in her craziest days, with her Boluskies and other madmen, she was never absurd as this."

"I think the Inspector likes them for their own sake," Adam remarked, musingly, "for I remember a gleam in his eye when the Canon handed him the beard that had fallen on the floor."

"Canon? Beard on the floor?" If she did not actually throw up her hands, she certainly contrived to appear as if she did. "Tell me exactly what you are talking about before I begin to scream."

She had had the outline of his story the night before, but there had not been time for the rich detail, which he now spread before her, concluding with what he considered to be an excellent character-sketch of the philosophical Sergeant Rundle. And what, she inquired when he had done, had become of this person? Had he turned up again, wearing horns and peeping over a wall in an attempt to look like a cow in a field? No, Adam had not seen him, or even thought about him. What, indeed, was Rundle doing? Somehow he could only think of him still standing, with a

glass of beer in each hand, in that room in *The Sun,* at Gloam. It had not occurred to him that Rundle was capable of projecting himself beyond the bounds of that room, that he might be somewhere just round the corner, still piecing together the "mosic" of this life.

This brought dinner to an end, and when the ladies had retired to let the men create, with the aid of wine and tobacco, their own peculiar atmosphere of mingled self-satisfaction and wistful dream, Adam set before himself the problem of crossing the desert of the evening. One thing was certain: the evening must not be spent with Nina or there would be a disastrous anti-climax. Should he hang about waiting for the return of those almost mythical creatures. Helen and Peter; or discover what entertainment there was to be had out of his fellow guests, though it was likely that the more amusing of them, and particularly the Baron, would be busily conspiring; or should he stroll towards the village again in the hope of seeing Hake, perhaps in another disguise? He decided for the stroll. Though dinner was over, the day was not, and as yet there was no gathering darkness to shepherd them into the drawing-room and sociability; people were dispersing again, and as there was nothing for him to do, he would not be thought churlish if he disappeared for an hour. So he walked out into a world of honeysuckle and mown grass, blue distances and quiet dust, where already the moon's frail shell was hanging in the sky, a lanthorn waiting for its light.

The impatience he had felt earlier when contemplating the two or three hours before him, fell away in the open, and he contrived to saunter into a state of mind that had in it some touch of the deep peace that lay about him. He heard the sunset calling of the birds and those distant shouts, from men late at work or children ending their play, that carry with them over evening fields a hint of melancholy; he saw the light begin to fade and dusk gather in the far crevices of the hills; but there were still golden eddies in the river as it swept down towards the bridge. There he lingered, sitting alone on the parapet, letting his eye travel idly down with the water until it swirled out of sight under the bridge, its gold gradually fading, changing to cold silvery lights. The evening burned and sank above his head in distant flakes of fire; there came a breath, chill, aromatic, from the high moors; sleep settled

on the fields; and still he lingered on, drowned in reverie.

He was roused at last by footfalls on the road. It was the Baron, bearing down upon him at a surprisingly brisk pace, an imposing figure swinging an enormous light dust-coat and crowned with a very wide-brimmed and altogether adventurous grey trilby. He was puffing away at a long cheroot that left behind it a visible trail of smoke. Even without speech, he seemed so charged with vitality, at once so massive and agile, so tremendously human, that immediately the very sight of him turned the whole evening into a mere back-cloth. Adam at once came out of his dim reverie which was shorn off as if with shears.

The Baron saluted him with a wave of the cheroot. "Ah, Mr Stewart," he cried, "do we dream while the hour is kind or is it merely an assignation? Can I command you? Good, then come with me to the village, where I take a last peep at the post-office. If I were less substantial and the post-office a little larger, I might be said to haunt the place. As it is, I'm for ever crowding it, and rumours of a frenzied demand for stamps, an orgy of telegraphing, at East Rudge, have flown round all the dales by this time." And he started off, with Adam in attendance. "It will probably be closed. Mrs. Wadden, the postmistress, will have put up the shutters and folded her face for the night. She's one of those women who seem to button and unbutton their faces. But even if the place is closed, an enthusiastic client has, I take it, his privileges, and I may inquire at the back door. I regret to think how much of my life has been passed inquiring at the back door. But a wire I expected is still missing."

He strode forward, alternately puffing out clouds of smoke and humming an unrecognizable tune. Adam, feeling very much the stripling, trotted by his side. East Rudge stopped and stared, or rather for the most part it merely stared, having already stopped for some time. The little post-office, which seemed to be entirely full of boiled sweets, was not shuttered but neither was it open, so the Baron, after looking at it for a moment with the air of a man about to open a small packing-case, excused himself and disappeared round the corner.

Adam sauntered on a few yards to the end of the street and found himself in the village square. The newest and most imposing thing in it was a stone monument that testified to the fact that

several of the brightest and strongest young men of the village had been shipped away to be riddled and smashed, left writhing on barbed wire or turning blind eyes to the splitting sky. You might say that a murdered Archduke, someone never even dreamt of here, had suddenly come one night and tapped one after another of them on the shoulder, a corpse dealing death. Adam stood for some time involuntarily brooding over this stone and its names. Where were they, these figures shredding away in the memory, these names whose remembered voices and faces were passing into limbo? Did they gather still in this square they knew so well, a cluster of pale ghosts around this monument talking soundlessly of the Salient and Mametz? Did they go peering through the windows of that inn there, with its gleam of gold above the open doorway? What was it? Ah, yes—"The Golden Fleece." A strange name that for such a place, one of those names and phrases that called up any number of flashing little pictures, of gods and what not, which somehow did not seem like mere tricks of fancy, patterns of foam on the surface of life, but suggested colossal realities, going on for ever, somewhere behind the complicated show of things. If you cleared away all this cluttering mass of stuff that seems to be life, you would find it there underneath, solid, clear-cut, enduring. Find what, though? Was he just happily muddling himself?

There was a step behind him. "I envy you that fine abstraction," said the Baron at his side, "newly come, as I am, from the back door and a barren quest."

"I was thinking about the Golden Fleece," Adam remarked.

The Baron clapped him on the shoulder. "Of course, you were. And I was thinking of the back door and a barren quest, as I observed. And that is how we stand, the little difference, eh?"

"It's the name of an inn over there." And Adam nodded his head in the direction of the gleaming sign.

"To me, in my present mood, it's the name of an inn anywhere. I'm for playing Jason, if you'll join me." And as they crossed the square, he went on: "A drink that will do good to the soul is hardly to be expected, I imagine; but even whisky, which was intended for the lubrication of commerce and card-playing, or beer, meant for those who sweat all day and like to sweat all night, will serve to take the taste of disillusion out of our mouths. But

wine, now; I could forget a thousand absent telegrams and half a dozen missing princes in a few glasses of good wine."

They looked up at the sign above the door and saw the fleece itself, as richly gilded as the sunset. The person appointed to sell all manner of liquors within, they read, was Z. Paddock. The Baron examined the symbol and the legend with relish, and then glanced at the open door, now hoarding dusk in front of them. "Z. Paddock of 'The Golden Fleece,' " he mused. "Why, here's fantasy for you. Here's a doorway that might lead anywhere; perhaps one of those moth-holes in the old faded tapestry of things; in you dive and everything's changed. Perhaps not, though. Paddock, I fancy, will keep us on this side of things, to twenty-four hours to the day, two and two make four. Unless Z. is too strong for Paddock. And what's Z?" And he sauntered in, followed closely by Adam. "Zabir, the Mohammedan mountain? Zadig, Voltaire's Babylonian? Zadkiel, the angel?" He was asking himself these questions rather than asking Adam, but in that narrow passage they resounded.

"Nay, there's no angels here," said a voice from nowhere. "It's Z. for Zedekiah. A Bible name, they tell me. They were great readers o' the Bible in these parts when I was a little lad."

Was this Z. Paddock himself? It must be. Adam could not see him because he was obscured by the vast bulk of the Baron, but no sooner had the voice stopped speaking than they had turned to the left out of the passage and were entering what appeared to be a deserted smoke-room. Paddock must have led the way, for now he stood revealed, a disappointingly commonplace innkeeper in his shirt-sleeves, a comfortable middle-aged figure with a large flattish red face, a bald head, close-cropped side-whiskers and enormous arched eyebrows that suggested a wondering simplicity. Apart from that, however, his face was entirely without expression and so remained whatever he was doing or saying. His voice was not without a certain plaintive strain, but this was always there and, for the rest, his flat tones never varied. He might be either a simpleton or a conscious humorist; there was no telling which he was from either his voice or manner. Adam seemed to remember rumours of an innkeeper somewhere in the dale, probably either here or at Semper lower down, who was famous for that rather grim ironic humour which passed for drollery in this part

of the world. Was Z. Paddock the man? He certainly did not look very interesting, failing disastrously to live up to his name and his inn-sign, but all that might be part of the fun. You never knew with these people.

The only large easy-chair groaned under the Baron, who was busy lighting another cheroot. Adam drew a smaller wooden armchair to the other side of the little table and stretched out his legs. Paddock wiped a few drops from the table and then stood, quite at his ease, looking down on them.

"Nah then, gentlemen, what'll you be drinking?" he inquired. "A nice drop o' lemonade?"

"I don't suppose," returned the Baron between preliminary puffs, "you've such a thing as a bottle of wine in the house, real wine, mark you, not sticky sweet port or sherry for the kitchen?"

Paddock rubbed his chin at this. "I don't know," he said meditatively, "but I rather think I've got a bottle or two that might surprise you." He left the room, only to return a minute later with two bottles thick with dust and web. "Madeira, this is. Old Madeira, older than any of us. Bual, they call it."

"What!" cried the Baron, whose nose had been hovering over the bottles. "An old Bual! Not another word before you bring two glasses, no, three glasses, and a corkscrew. Quick! before there's an earthquake or the next glacial age sets in or some hocus-pocus of Time and Space disperses us." And on Paddock's departure for the glasses, he grew lyrical over the find. "A wine stuffed with thirty thousand sunsets, mellowing for us, subduing its great heart of fire, when we were in our cradles. You don't know it? Then to-night you drink for the first time. They might well call it 'The Golden Fleece'; my boy, we're indeed on the shores of Colchis, and here are benevolent enchantments; Medea smiles on us."

Paddock returned with glasses and corkscrew and opened the first bottle. "Pour out, pour out, but reverently, mind," cried the Baron. "And fill a glass for yourself." The noble liquor, rich, dark, but with gleams of red gold at the heart of it, took possession of the glasses as the soul might its body. Slowly, without a word the three of them drank. To Adam, who had never before tasted, that most sunburnt of all wines, let alone such a rare mellowed version of it, this first sip was a revelation; it seemed as if the

Ode to Autumn were sliding over his palate; the flavour of it and the deep generous warmth brought to his mind all the richest and friendliest, the most golden things of this world, so that he seemed to be drinking whole happy Septembers, glowing interiors by Rembrandt, Beethoven slow movements for strings, seas and sunsets where merchantmen crowded with sail went swaying and glimmering. By the time his glass was empty, the darkening room they sat in was touched with fantasy, shadows from a dream moving in its dusk and draping its walls with strange tapestries.

But his companions were talking. The Baron, already glowing, had inquired how this wine had found its way there.

"Did you ever hear tell of the Stookly-Gavells, a big family in these parts?" inquired Paddock in return. And then when the Baron had admitted that the name Stukely-Gavell was not unfamiliar to him, the landlord continued: "Well, this belonged to them. They'd nobbut a few bottles left, odds and ends like, and I took what they had when their place over yonder, Semper Hall, was sold up, a few years back. Aye, Sir Hubert had to sell up, not long after he'd come into possession, he were that badly off."

"I thought they were one of our rich old families," the Baron remarked. "What was it that brought them down? Drink? Horses? Speculation?"

"It were none of them things," replied Paddock, "but summat you'd never think of. It were pictures."

"What, did they lose all their money buying pictures?"

"Nay, it were them they had left 'em that did it. You'll have heard of Ockerman, the painter, that lived a while back?" They nodded to show that the fame of Ochreman, the great landscape artist of the early nineteenth century, had long been known to them. "Well, one of these Stookly-Gavells, old Sir Thomas it was, had helped this Ockerman, put him up at the Hall when he came painting in these parts. And the long and short of it was that this Ockerman, when he died, left hundreds and hundreds of paintings and drawings and such-like to the family on condition they'd keep 'em together in a room, let people see 'em, but never part with 'em. They passed their word they would, and they have done, and that's been the ruin of 'em."

He paused, and his listeners, fitting snugly into their parts, looked as puzzled as he could have wished, though he showed no

trace of gratification. He took up his glass, and added: "Death duties did it. They had death duties to pay on all that lot, and these hundreds of paintings and drawings have been going up and up in price every year till they're worth two or three fortunes. And every time the head of the family dies, they have to pay on what they're worth, but can't or won't sell 'em. Next death'll mean bankruptcy. If they were mine, I'd have 'em stolen, and ask a few thousand for leaving the window open one dark night."

He emptied his glass, and when the Baron made a motion towards it with the bottle, shook his head: "Nay, that'll do nicely for me, gentlemen. Another glass o' that and I'll be giving away all the other liquor I've got to-night. It's my business to see other folks in that state o' mind and not meself." He drew the curtains across the little windows, lighted an oil lamp hanging from the low roof, and retired to dispense humbler liquors.

"Our Paddock is of the earth," said the Baron, filling the glasses, "and like the earth is full of good things and is a mystery; whether foolish or ironic we cannot tell. I give you the king, the king across the water!" And he drank.

Adam waited long enough to remark: "But he isn't any longer across the water," and then followed his example, seeming to swim up through warm golden seas into sunshine.

"Happily not," returned the other, whole vineyards still ripening in his eyes, "though he was until a day or two ago. Not abroad, but"—and here he lowered his voice—"at Surbiton, where he was living when I first found him. These are, you understand, secrets; we whisper together in Colchis. He had been trained as a conjurer; and was excellent, too, with cards and eggs but still a trifle awkward, I thought, with the rabbit; and had already fulfilled one or two engagements at children's parties when I first met him, not, of course, under his proper name. I assure you he could not have had a better training; it has given him a manner, a presence, and he knows what to do with his hands, exquisitely dexterous hands, as you will notice."

"But won't people feel——" Adam began.

"They would if they knew," the Baron interrupted, "and that is why I tell you these things as one Argonaut to another: this is news only, so to speak, in Madeira. Let us empty our glasses and fill up. For my own part," he went on, after attending to the wine,

"I regret that the matter cannot be made public. The thought of the conjurer-king fills me with ecstasy. The conjuring is the last perfect touch. See how he stands. He represents an old, a gallant, an apparently lost cause, which, as I pointed out to you or to somebody at breakfast this morning, will always remain a lost cause, in the sense of being an imperfectly realized idea, even though it should be successful. If it is, he will be the most important person in the world, and yet he will still be nobody, that is, he will not be one of your bullies in office, with their feet planted in the middle of your back, but the personification of an idea. But that in addition he should be also, in private life, a conjurer, producing illusion within illusion, is to me the last perfect touch. Where else shall you find such a king, such an apex for the pyramid of true social and political life? We'll drink to the pyramid and finish the bottle."

The pyramid was duly honoured and the bottle emptied. Secure and happy in the very centre of the vast, friendly, sun-moon-and-star-lighted concert hall of the universe, Adam sat and heard the noble symphony of life go sounding on, its moments growing in splendour. Here they were, he and the Baron, snug in the very heart of things, nourished by this divine juice. Undoubtedly the Baron was great, physically and mentally a great man, old wine in person, epical, looming. Could you say a loomer? No, and that was a pity. But epical, epical! And he, Adam Stewart, was in his right place by the side of this epical person; for though he might seem young, a nobody, he was, mysteriously perhaps, but there it was, tremendously important. The Baron had seen it, Nina had seen it, and they would all, Helen, Peter, all of them, see it before they had done. But the Baron was saying something, opening the other bottle with the corkscrew that Paddock had left behind, and a damned sensible thing to do, sensible, too, of Paddock to leave it behind. But there, they were all very sensible men, all three of them; dreamers too, poets if you like. But no, not Paddock; he was just sensible.

What was the Baron saying? Adam raised his newly-filled glass and the one glorious draught that emptied it suddenly and strangely cleared his head, giving him eyes and ears of extraordinary sensitiveness. Every surface in the room stood out sharply, in all its own peculiar quality of mingled light and shadow,

just as if he had suddenly set up an easel to paint it. Every word his companion uttered fell upon his ears as distinct as the chime of a little silver bell. There was something more than dream, there was vision, with all its clarity, in this wine.

"To oppose, as many do," the Baron was saying, "unstinted service of a cause to the enjoyment of all the good things in this world is not to understand this life of ours. This service and this enjoyment are not contradictory; they cherish one another. There must be, I say, the over-mastering idea, steadying and finally shaping into a pattern what is otherwise the mere flux of things. That nourishes the cause you serve."

"It does," said Adam, very firmly.

"But without that, steadying and shaping," the Baron went on, filling the glasses again, "life rots, rots in the dish while we sit at table. There was a time, my boy, when I thought it sufficient to sit there, merely taking and enjoying what life offered. I would pass pleasantly from sensation to sensation. My snout was among the truffles. But it was useless, for the one sensation on which I could count was the very one I was scheming to avoid at all costs, boredom—and worse. The whole thing went maggoty before my eyes. What did I do? I clutched at an idea, a movement, cause, anything to serve with body, brain and soul; and threw the whole rotting rest away. What was the result? It all came back, sound and whole and lovelier than ever; the table was spread for me again, with art and wine and beautiful faces and whatever I sought out before, and there at that table I can sit and enjoy this life until the end comes." And he hailed this conclusion with another glass of Madeira.

"I drink to its perpetual delay," said Adam, suiting the action to the words. He was pleased with the phrase, but a little surprised when he found himself repeating it after he had set down his glass. The repetition made it sound rather silly.

"But——" the Baron burst out, quite explosively, as if he had been suddenly contradicted—"but beware of escapes from life into service of an idea. You go, only to return. Remember that. Love of life, not of your own notion of it but of the real thing itself, the common immemorial pattern of existence, the structure that can only be built on the time-old foundations, must be at the bottom of it all, and not hatred of life, which you find in so many

reformers and revolutionaries, who are all children of the Devil. Beware of them, I say, if they serve an idea but have no love of common things, if they work on because they cannot enjoy; they are vanity with a stamping iron heel."

"They bring nothing to us but the bed of old Procrustes," Adam chimed in, stammering a little over the name.

"A ripe image," said the Baron, busy once more with the bottle, "proving there is something to be said for old wine in a new skin. Yes, they are the sausage-makers to the ancient devils of Pride and Negation, and they see the rest of humanity as their branded hogs. That is what we are coming to, a division into pigs and sausage-makers. Don't be deceived by the pretended pure devotion and self-sacrifice of these gentry, as you see them in Russia and elsewhere, for there's no self-sacrifice in doing without the things you don't want, a happy leisure and friendship and the graces and ancient kindnesses of this life, in order to do what pleases you most, the stamping of other people's lives with the cramped pattern of your own ideas. This is the very debauchery of power and pride. We'll drink to its speedy confusion."

Adam found that his toast, owing perhaps to its wording, put an end to his former condition of abnormally clear vision and hearing, for both sights and sounds now lost their keen edge and came to him through some blurred window-pane of dream. The Baron looked enormous and was still swelling, but his nose had grown out of all proportion, and now it seemed to dominate the whole wavering field of sight. Wherever you looked, there it burned gigantically. As there seemed to be no possibility of avoiding the nose, the only thing left to do was to stare at it boldly and meditate upon it. This Adam did, bringing the nose into focus after a short struggle and then pondering over its monstrous size and shape and colouring. He kept it fairly steady before him but not without difficulty, for like everything there, once it was fairly caught, it wanted to hurry away, to flitter about the room, a room that appeared to be steadily abandoning its character of rigid cube. That was the lighting, of course, for these oil lamps played the most curious tricks, now elongating their flames, now dividing them into two or three. The Baron was still saying something or other, but Adam, still pre-occupied with the nose, could only make out that it was about power. Power, indeed! What about noses?

A thought about the oddness of noses, the millions of them, their varying shapes and sizes, the way in which they were stuck on the front of heads and went sniffing about, suddenly invaded his mind, and then, quite to his surprise, he found himself giggling out loud.

This would not do. The Baron might think he was drunk. He cut short the giggles, dismissed the nose, and stared hard at his left shoe while he tried to piece together his companion's words. "This other form of power, working interiorally . . ." Surely that could not be it—"interiorally?" Had the Baron said "interiorally?" Something very droll about that word. He wanted to laugh again, but pulled himself up and listened. "In the end, circumstance withers at its touch, withers, withers," the Baron was declaring with tremendous emphasis. "Or, if you like, it comes to shape itself to our hand. This power increases by its exercise. It leaves us lords of destiny." Admirable that; it summed up the whole matter, all that the evening had really meant, that remark about "withered circumstance" and "lords of destiny." He saw it all now. But there was something more, perhaps a grand conclusion? "We leave behind us nothing broken, nothing ruined, life sound and whole, and yet we conquer." And the Baron repeated, with a magnificent air of finality, "We conquer."

"Time, please, gentlemen!" That was Paddock at the door; Z. Paddock, the sensible fellow. The sight of him, even though he seemed to waver a little, cooled and braced Adam.

"Time, indeed!" said the Baron, waving an arm and then taking up the bottle. "A final glass?" Adam shook his head, on which too fierce a sun seemed to have been beating down, for already it ached a little. The Baron rapidly disposed of the remaining wine, and then while Paddock removed the bottles and glasses, plunged tumultuously into what appeared to be a settlement of the world's affairs. When they arose to depart, he had arrived at a combined monarchy of the British Empire and the United States. By the time they had reached the door of the room, Europe was settled and Asia had put most of her troubles behind her. But there were difficulties about the Near East, Arabia and Central Africa, and these were not definitely concluded even when they had reached the end of the passage to the outer door, a passage that had lengthened out considerably since their arrival. The door was

closed, and what with the problem of finding the latch and determining the fate of Arabia, it was some time before they opened it. When they did, however, they were immediately recalled by a voice behind them. It was Paddock. They had overlooked Paddock.

"Happen you've forgotten, like," said Paddock, "but there's summat owing for the liquor."

"Of course, of course," cried the Baron, with Adam his echo. "Why didn't you remind us before?"

"Well," said Paddock, very softly and slowly, "I reckoned you'd better settle Africa and Arabia first. It'll be thirty shilling."

Hastily, they each handed him a pound note and walked out into the moonlight, where he followed to stand for a moment bidding them good night beneath his sign, now changed into a silver fleece. They were all of them bathed in silver, but there were deep shadows in the square and now you could hardly see the memorial. "Farewell to Colchis," the Baron murmured as they turned their backs on the inn. Something about Medea and Madeira fluttered in Adam's mind, but any possible remark was too troublesome. These moonlit cobbles were not easy to walk on. The deep quiet, the silvered stones and the sprawling, idiotic shadows were oddly disturbing; everything was unreal, grotesque; as if you had suddenly been projected into one of those crazy German films. He would say nothing, and keep his head. The Baron, too, said nothing. Like men in a dream, they passed through the drowned village, silent, unstirring, at the bottom of its deep sea of moonlight.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE VENTURER BY NIGHT

THE walk back was like one of those half-hours spent on the borderlands of sleep, occasions when all manner of chimeras visit the mind and, having arrived too early to be accepted without question and too late to be definitely rejected, wander about there spectrally, now headless, now bodiless. Adam found himself possessed by a fancy that there were two nights, the one outside himself, cool and large and silvered, and the other inside himself, closer, darker, tropical, with here and there leaping and fragrant fires. One half of him, with pale little earth-bound legs, plunged on in this outer night, while the other half kept within, looking on at some dark festival by the edge of a black sea. It was all very confusing but not unpleasant. If it became too confusing, sleep would settle it, blotting out both nights. Sleep was like the rich velvet curtain at the theatre, coming down with a soft swish to put an end to things for a time, to let them sort out themselves. How terrible it would be if they just went on and on, becoming more and more complicated! But sleep was there, close at hand, if he should want it. He could lie down under the hedge there, just as he was, and make to-morrow arrive, begin an entirely new piece. And there were not enough people sleeping under hedges. Why should he not try it, and have done with this ridiculous walking? But no, it was all too amusing; after all, you could sleep any time. He felt constrained to say something to the Baron.

"It's odd, you know, all very odd," he cried, "but it's wonderful!"

The Baron, faced with this simple statement, acted in the most curious fashion, for instead of replying to it, he looked Adam in the face, burst into a roar of laughter, looked him in the face again, then took hold of his arm and marched him forward at a brisker pace. Did the Baron think he was drunk?

"I'm not drunk, really I'm not," Adam remarked, adding as an afterthought, "but I'm very thirsty."

"As you're young enough to stand the shock of drinking water," said the Baron, "that's soon remedied. I'm very sorry to say that the river is behind us, if you've any ambitions that way; but there should be a stream somewhere here. Listen!" And he held up his hand. "You can hear it gurgling over there. Go through the gate and help yourself, but don't drink the moon up if you find it there."

Adam found the stream, which was indeed liquid moonshine a little further up, but dark and moonless where he was. He knelt down in the dew and plunged his face into the swift cold water, drinking and bathing both at once. It had all the old moorland tang, the chilly sweetness of rain in high places, and when he had chokingly slaked his thirst and raised his wet face, chilled and stinging as if salted, he felt quite different. It was as if the tropic night inside him had been washed away, its fires quenched by this moorland rain. As he returned to the road, he had with him a little picture of a crystal flood pouring down into the hot darkness and vanquishing it. He felt more at ease. The night and he were now all of a piece, both cool and large and moonlit. Was this what people meant by "pulling oneself together?"

The Baron was waiting for him, looking like a monstrous fowl perched on the shining bough of the road. Adam received a clap on the shoulder, and then they marched on together without a word. A few more minutes brought them to the gate of the house, that wonderful house. Adam could not trouble to think out exactly why it was so wonderful, but he knew that it was and that all other places were desolation beside it. He tried to imagine himself going to any other house but this, shudderingly saw himself creeping into some brick box of dullness, then hugged his good fortune. Here, in this house, things began, sprang into light, and did not tamely end as they did in most other, perhaps all other, houses, where your glorious day was looked over, roughly, folded up and then hurried out of sight as if it were a soiled tablecloth.

"It's not very late," the Baron remarked as they walked up the drive, "but speaking as one voyager over the purple seas to another, I venture to suggest to you—bed. The alternative is the drawing-room and a deplorable fifth act of mere chat to the day's play. Better to sleep. Let the good ship, so gloriously

ballasted, seek the furthest and most fantastic ports, dream or oblivion."

Adam agreed that it was perhaps best for him to turn in at once. They rounded the last corner and arrived at the front of the house, where a motionless figure suddenly started into life at the sight of them. It was Mr. Hooby, and he had shed his usual heavy immobility and appeared to be almost excited.

"There you are at last, Baron," he cried, starting forward. "I've been looking for you all over this place."

"My apologies for eluding you," returned the Baron smoothly. "Mr. Stewart and I walked down to the village, chanced to meet an old friend of mine there, and could not depart until we had swallowed him, so that now, you may say, he returns with us. But what is it? Great news?"

"Well, no, not exactly that," Mr. Hooby confessed in a lowered voice. And then, glancing at Adam and leading the Baron a little to one side, he went on: "But I've recollected just where I saw that girl in there, the Russian one, and I said to myself, 'the Baron's just got to be told about this.' "

The Baron held up his hand. "Good! Then one moment, please." He turned to Adam and towered over him benevolently. "More business. Is it bed for you, then? Wise youth. Bon voyage to you and old Bual. Yet, if there are any apologies to be made for you, I'll make them. Good night." He did not turn away immediately but stood for a moment as if in humorous concern, so that Adam did not feel that he had been dismissed as he nodded in return and made for the house. All that he wanted was to escape from the others in there and to reach his room in safety. At this moment he felt that there was nothing on earth so much to be dreaded as a lighted drawing-room full of eyes and polite inquiries.

As he crept along the hall, the sound of voices reached him and there was one quaking moment when he heard a door-handle being turned. But no one came out to find him sneaking in like a thief. The voices made him feel guilty, mean; yet curiously mixed with this feeling was another, very different, a kind of contempt for the people in there, chatting in their innocence, unaware of the shadow that flitted through the hall. Were Helen and Peter now behind those doors? It was strange, exciting too, to think of their

being so near, for although they had been away only twelve hours or so, those hours had been an immense pageant, a solid history, and so had robbed them of common flesh and blood and made them as remote and glamorous as the Andes. Yet he did not regret that he was creeping up the stairs away from them, for he felt that they did not belong to to-day and would have been ready to resent their forcing their way into it as real persons. Nina, now; Nina was different. As that name sprang up, there came a buzz of excited recognition from somewhere at the back of his mind, a brightness shone round it. What was that about?

There was nobody in the long dim corridor that led to his room. As he closed the door, he felt almost triumphant. He also felt rather dizzy, and flung himself down on the bed just as he was, without even troubling to make a light. The room, indeed all that side of the house, was in shadow but there was bright moonlight in the garden outside and he had no desire to shut it out, to banish the night and transform his room into a little yellow box, by drawing the curtains and lighting the candles. He liked his room as it was, a little hollow dusky place in a quiet corner of the night. But though the window was wide open, the place was warm, too warm, as if the midsummer day still lurked in the house. Adam had long ago walked off the cool of that stream, and now he began to feel quite hot, so after lying on the bed for a few minutes, lying still in a swimming, swaying world, he decided that he would be better without his clothes. With an effort, he sat up; the world steadied itself; he took off his shoes, then rose to his feet and slowly, almost mechanically, undressed himself.

Undoubtedly it was pleasanter in pyjamas. He had had those clothes on too long; there was the day's heat and dust in them; to escape from them into silk and free air was a sensuous pleasure. Already he felt cooler and steadier and clearer in the head. The mere act of undressing should have doubly prepared him for bed and sleep, but by some curious chance it had left him indifferent to them. He was by no means entirely wakeful, though dreamy rather than sleepy, but he felt less inclined every minute to get into bed. Sleep would definitely put an end to the day, and now he did not want it to end. To-morrow, no doubt, would be still more wonderful, that being the way of to-morrows when things are at the flow; but that was not the point; to-day still mattered.

There was still something missing, something to be waited for before oblivion came crashing down and this day was gone for ever. He could not escape from this odd conviction, and while he turned it over and over, involuntarily he made ready to act upon it. He thrust his feet into slippers, put on his thin silk dressing-gown, discovered some cigarettes in the pocket and lit one, and went over to the open window.

The garden below, with its haze of moonlight, its honeysuckle breath, its deep quiet, might have been created by those soft opening chords of the overture to *The Magic Flute*. It was indeed the very landscape for Mozart, an air for muted strings and flutes magically transformed into moon-coloured lawns, heaped blossom, dark foliage against a mist of stars. There was at first a silence, not silence absolute, but a breathing quiet; but in a little while sound after sound reached to his ears, which went through their old sentry duty in the night without any commands from the dreamer they served. There was many a tiny scratching and rustling in the bushes below. An owl would go hooting through the shadows and once a dog barked far away. Then there were sounds from the house itself, sounds of distant doors and stairs, faint laughter, footfalls quickly dying away, and as a climax the noise of a door or window being opened below, a distinct dry of "What a lovely night!" in a voice he could not recognize, a murmur following after, then the sound of the door or window being closed. The life of the house, of the garden, of the shining world beyond, ebbed away into a silence that might have been that of the drowned courts of Atlantis.

Here was enchantment, but Adam himself, looking upon it, felt disenchanted. He stared through the window as if at another world. Melancholy crept down upon him. He felt lonely, neglected, outcast, defeated by invisible armies in some incomprehensible war. Nothing but a faint but inextinguishable feeling of foolishness, a tiny buzz of protest somewhere, like an angry solitary bee in the desolated garden of his mind, kept him from those tears of self-pity that are the secret and sinful indulgences, the bottles hidden in the cupboard, of sensitive souls. Once past the turning-point, his tears unshed, he rallied and even turned upon himself in derision. What was he hanging about for, like a fool! Why did he not go to bed as everyone else had done! Impatiently

he turned away, found the sponge, dipped it in his water-jug and passed it over his neck and face, which he then rubbed vigorously with his rough towel.

There was virtue in the rite, which may possibly have dispelled some lingering fumes of old Bual, for with the towel still in his hand he happened to glance at the wall, his wall—yes! and someone else's; and then he remembered. Nina, of course! That was what he was waiting for, that comedy of looking at the photographs in her room, that knocking on the wall. One part of him, busily splashing in every new bright wave, had forgotten the compact of the afternoon, while the other part had patiently, ploddingly remembered through everything and now had kept the whole of him dallying. What was he to do about it? Had she been in earnest or had she merely been rounding off the afternoon's play in the best tradition of elaborate and naughty comedy? Still standing there, towel in hand, he revisited that orchard and flashed through its glamorous scene once more. The thought of her, warm, intimate, adorable, crashing through his melancholy, laughing away that lonely figure staring at the alien lovely night, took complete possession of him. His heart, now promised adventure, leaped forward to a swifter stroke. He looked at the wall, less than a yard away, as if it were some magical contrivance, as if letters of fire might soon blaze across it.

Would he or would he not hear that knocking on the wall? He could not be sure she was there, behind the wall; on the other hand, even if she were there, perhaps she did not know that he was back in the house, not having set eyes on him since dinner. Yet the thought of nothing happening this night was now unendurable. He knew that he would not be able to sleep now for hours, and he saw himself lying there, sleepless, wretched, all ears, waiting for a signal that never came, waiting until the unbroken silence was one vast ache. Sharply, as if to dismiss the horrid sight, he swung round to replace his towel on the rail, stumbled over one of its projecting feet and was pitched forward against the wall, that very same wall, only saving his head from a terrific bump by throwing out his arms at the last moment, so that he came in contact with the wall in three places instead of one. Even as it was his head received a smart rap, but it was the shock and jar, rather than any actual pain, that jangled his nerves and left him

very annoyed with himself. What a fool he was! Was he still dizzy or half-drunk or what? Damn the Baron's famous old Madeira! His skull still rattling, he sat down on the edge of his bed.

And then, miraculously, the wall opposite came to life. Tap! Tap! Tap! His heart fluttered and then pounded away furiously. But had he heard aright? Perhaps his ears were flattering him. He went over to the wall and stood there listening, shakily. Yes, there it went again, three distinct taps. If he knocked himself and there came a reply, all possibility of merely accidental tapping would be swept away. He rapped three times slowly with his knuckle, and now there could be no mistake for the magic wall immediately responded with three more taps. Breathless, he stood for a moment, his foot poised on the threshold of adventure, then very softly he opened his door, peered down the empty corridor, and crept out. A moment later he had closed Nina's door behind him.

She was standing there in the middle of the room, a finger at her lip. The closely curtained place with its single candle flame, dim, warm, faintly scented, was her casket. She seemed smaller and slighter and yet more rounded than before, seemed to shine through her loose green wrap, as she stood there lifting to him eyes and lips that had borrowed some touch of darkness from the surrounding dusk. For a moment he could not move nor even force a whisper, he could only stare. The room, almost glowing round her, now flickered before his eyes, shook and trembled with his heart.

As soon as she whisked past him to the door and softly turned the key, everything steadied itself and cleared. He looked round at her, in time to see a rosy heel slip in and out of a little green slipper. Then, his glance returning with her from the door, he noticed the assembly of candle, mirror and photographs on the dressing-table. All the properties were there. Suddenly he wanted to laugh. Not that it was very funny, but nevertheless he wanted to laugh so badly that he soon felt his inside shaken by soundless mirth.

With a glance of bright mischief and a whispered remark that he could not catch, she crossed to the dressing-table and took up a photograph. Adam tip-toed forward, gently removed the photograph with one hand and turned her round with the other. His hand remained on her shoulder, trembling a little, while he looked down at her face, now in shadow. There was, he fancied, some-

thing faintly whimsical there, an arch of the brows, a deepening a the corners of her mouth; and now his hand clasped her shoulder and did not merely rest upon it. She lifted her chin an inch or so, and moved or swayed towards him for the tiniest fraction of distance. It was enough. His arms were about her, clasping her to him; his hand, fingers deep in gold hair, was raising the head that was slightly tilted away; and now they were kissing with a fullness and passion the afternoon had not known, kissing with all midsummer in their lips.

He loosened his hold and drew a deep breath. Instinctively he cast a look at the candle-flame, unwavering in the still air, and swiftly her glance followed his. Their eyes met, to read the doom of their solitary light. Now for a moonbeam-haunted dusk, his lady there a glimmer of white flesh, her hair and eyes and mouth so many shadows! Adam took a step forward and stretched out his hand towards the candle.

It was arrested in very mid-air. There were footfalls in the corridor outside, and they halted at the door. Then came a thundering knock, so downright and confident after the stealthy little noises of the last ten minutes that it seemed as if a whole world were seeking admittance. Then voices, two or three of them, the Baron's amongst them: "Miss Bersieneff! Miss Bersieneff!"

Nina's eyes were like pin-points. She laid a finger on her lip, crept over to the bed and then upon it, made it creak as if she were laboriously and sleepily turning over, and sent out a drowsy " 'Ullo! What is that?" The reply came, "We want to speak to you at once, please!" At this her face hardened and she seemed to bite her lip. "Al—right then," she cried, "I make myself ready." She flashed impatient eyes, accompanied by a frantic gesture of the arm, at Adam, standing there stunned by the gigantic débris from this irruption.

He awoke to life, an almost suffocatingly dramatic life. His business was to get out at once. But where and how? He might hide, like a man in a farce, but the idea of jamming himself in a wardrobe or under the bed was repulsive. There was nothing for it but the window. He slipped across, pushed back the curtains and looked out. At least twenty feet gloomed between him and the flower-beds, but a fairly stout water-pipe ran down not far

to the right. But was it within reach? Without so much as a glance behind him at Nina, he hauled himself up and contrived to sit on the sill with his legs dangling outside. Even when he reached the extreme right of the sill, however, he could only just touch the pipe with the tips of his fingers. And he must hurry, hurry! Could he kneel on the sill and then make a spring forward, grab the pipe and slide down? No, he couldn't! But there was some thickish creeper that came to an end a foot or two below the window. Could he let himself down from the window, find some support for his feet in the creeper, and so launch himself at the pipe? Lord, what a game! He swung himself over, hanging down from the window ledge until his feet found something substantial in the creeper, then he made a wild grab at the pipe with one hand. At the first hint of his weight the creeper gave way, and he found himself hanging dizzily on one arm or rather four finger-tips, but he contrived to clutch the far side of the pipe with his left hand and, swinging over in that direction, he launched himself down. Pipe, creeper, house and all shot up, and bump!—the flower-beds, hard earth, thorns innumerable, scattered blossoms. What a game! And now he was sore and dizzy, with one bare ankle full of thorns and his left hand badly skinned; nevertheless he suddenly felt ecstatic, perched on his thirty seconds of glorious life.

He had not time to pick himself up before things went mad. He heard a bush, about thirty feet away, make some remark that sounded like "Well, ah'll be domned!" Then there emerged from it a large figure that came lumbering across the lawn. Adam had no intention of staying to meet this fellow, whoever he was. Careless of the thorns still pricking him, his thin crumpled slippers and his soreness, he leaped from the flower-bed on to the path that encircled the house and fled down it, without knowing where he was going, but conscious that he was being pursued. Flying round the corner, where he went from shadow to deeper shadow, he crashed into another large man who made a grab at him that he contrived to elude by dodging under the outstretched arms and then doubling away across the lawn. He heard Number Two coming on heavily behind, and out of the corner of his eye, as he sped across the moonlit grass, he saw Number One, now revealed as a policeman, crossing to cut off his retreat. How many more of them were there? Would large men start up from every bush?

The policeman was not quick enough to head him off, and so he was able to dart through into the rose-garden. There followed a most exhilarating game of hide-and-seek, the three of them racing between the flower-beds, dodging round the laurel hedges, now hiding in the leafy shadows, now splashing through the moonlight. His pursuers were apparently as anxious as he was not to make a noise that would rouse the house, and so there were no sounds but heavy breathing and a thud-thud or a rustle to mark the progress of the game. Adam's feet were wet with dew and he was somewhat blown; but he was loving every moment of it. A colossal spree! As he finally changed tactics and with a fine swerve raced for the drive, he felt he would have given anything to have had a football under his arm. Why not moonlit football? He reached the head of the drive and ran between the walls of rhododendron, gaining easily with every stride. Yes, moonlit football! Burglars *v.* Policemen. Drop kicks over the chimney-pots. After he had turned the second corner of the drive, he was so far ahead that he could not even hear footsteps behind him, so he slackened his pace and considered his next move. He had no intention of quitting the grounds, and his best plan was to try and hide himself in the rhododendron until they passed, or to double back behind the impenetrable screen of leaves. It would be necessary first, though, to find a place where it was not impenetrable.

A few yards further on he came to a little recess in the shrubbery where a curved seat had been smuggled in, and here the bushes at the back were thinner and offered some sort of entrance. But the place was in the light and would inevitably attract attention. He looked about him for another possible opening, and discovered one on the other side, almost opposite the seat but deep in shadow. Not without prickings and scratches, he contrived to wriggle through and lose himself in the musty darkness, and there he remained, half kneeling, half lying, for now there was no time for any further move. Heavy footfalls, not running but still moving briskly, were sounding close at hand. He had only just been in time. Drawing himself up a little and then leaning against a low bough, he moved his head this way and that until finally he was able to peer through the foliage. He could see a yard or two of the drive and the curved seat opposite.

They were here. He held his breath. They stopped exactly in

his field of vision, and he could see their large round bodies. One was obviously the local policeman. The other was in plain clothes, and as his face was hidden there was nothing to be made of him. Both were puffing and blowing.

"He'll ha' gone, ah'm thinking," panted the policeman. "Too light i't' foot for us, sergeant. What's next to do?"

The sergeant, who appeared to be busy mopping his face, grunted something indistinguishable and then would seem to have pointed to the seat, for they moved over to it and sat down with the air of men who had more than done their duty. The light was waning and treacherous, and though their faces were now turned towards him, Adam, as he peered through the leaves, could not see them very clearly.

"Well, sergeant, what d'you mak' on't?" the policeman asked, after a short respectful silence.

There was no reply for a moment because the other had taken out a little pipe, stuck it into his large face, and was now busy lighting up. Every movement he made seemed familiar to Adam; the face, illuminated by the match-flame, rushed into recognition; and the first few words he spoke were nothing but a grand confirmation. It was Sergeant Rundle! The great man had emerged from the parlour of "The Sun," had descended into Runnerdale, to brood by day and watch by night, and had just been playing hide-and-seek with him in the garden. The shifting mosaic of this life had brought them together again. Oh, most excellent "mosic"!

"What do I make of it, eh?" Rundle boomed, very slowly and with intervals for the conduct of his pipe. "Well, now, that's a question. Of course, to begin with, there's things here that you don't understand and that it's not my business to tell you of. But you know, because you've been told already, that there's something queer going on here, and that's why I said I'd have a look round with you to-night. And what happens, eh? Why, something happens right off. This chap comes sliding down the wall, you tell me, and off he goes, helter-skelter in his bare feet and night-shirt, so to speak."

"It's a suspisus circunstance," remarked the constable.

"It's all that," Rundle went on, impressively, "but what I says about it is this. We don't know what this 'ere's about, this chap

sliding down the wall in his nightshirt; it's a new development, is this, and it'll have to be reported to the Inspector. Maybe it's something to do with this other business and maybe not, we don't know, even I don't know. But what I says about it is that it jus shows you how these queer things run together, which you yourself, as a right-thinking man with experience in the Force, fo there's experience to be had even out here, will have noticed Start with one queer bit o' business, nothing definite, nothing to convict on, you might say, but queer, the sort that the Yard keeps its eye on; well, start with one o' them, and you'll find quee things all round it, just like this chap to-night. Everything, you might say, is fishy from the start. I come here just to give the place a look round, and right off I've got to go chasing a young fellow in his nightshirt. The same yesterday, when we'd hardly got started on the case, just landed from the train, and goes up to the little pub in the village over the hills there."

"Aye, that'll be 'T'Sun' at Gloam," said the other, deeply interested. "I did heer summat. What were that, Sergeant?"

But Rundle had evidently decided to keep last night's adventure to himself, for now he stood up and made a move forward. "If you hear anything," he remarked with ponderous solemnity, "you ask 'em where they got their information from and tell 'em to be careful what they're saying. The less that's said about this business the better, constable, you can take it from me. Not a word now about these doings to-night, which I'm going to make a report of to the Inspector. Your way's back to the village there, isn't it?"

The other gave a somewhat melancholy assent, and the two of them, without another word, went clumping down the drive. Adam did not stir until the sound of their footsteps had died away, and then he wriggled out to a happy release of free air and movement. He was dirty, tired, scratched and sore, but as he made his way back to the house, the campaign at end and himself a young veteran, a blessed mood of content took possession of him. The night was fast shedding its brilliance; a wind was rising from the south-west and blowing away the last memories of heat and dust; and under a sinking moon and a cool glimmer of stars he walked in peace, walked home through the ruin of old wars. The long slow curves of the drive and the deepening shadow of its shrub-

beries were themselves part of the exquisite falling close of the day's adventurous verse.

It was past midnight and the house wore a shuttered look. The front door was closed and did not offer him even a handle to turn. How was he to get in without waking the servants, without having to bleat some lying excuse through an inch or two of opened door? Debating the question, he strolled round the corner and was there rewarded by the sight of the dining-room windows, where a solitary glimmer of light shone through the drawn curtains. They were French windows, and as he cautiously crept up he was relieved to find that one of them was still open. There was nothing for it but to enter through this window, and make what excuses he could to the people in the room. He pushed back the curtain and walked in, to find himself confronting the one person whose presence there would not be an embarrassment, his companion of "The Golden Fleece."

The Baron was standing at the sideboard devouring a noble slab of meat pie, and the fork he was wielding stopped in mid-air when he saw Adam standing there, grimy and tousled, his dressing-gown covered with leaf and mould. "What have we here!" he cried. "Why, this is a worse gluttony than mine! I thought you were in bed and asleep hours ago."

"Lord, but I'm hungry!" Adam exclaimed. "Can I join you?"

"Sit down," the Baron commanded, and then set before him an equally large slice of meat pie and a generous whisky and soda. "Meat and drink, and then the story. I, too, have had a crowded two hours, but you would seem to have slain your thousands."

Adam fell to and when the keen edge of his appetite had been blunted and he had performed a little rapid censoring, he produced a not unconvincing though garbled version of the night's adventures, substituting for his visit to Nina's room a mere desire for fresh air and a stroll about the garden. He described in detail his encounter with Rundle and the local policeman, and then when he had done with that, being anxious to lead his hearer away from the dubious portion of his narrative and, like every man who has been lying, feeling that he ought to be liberal with safe truths, he added an account of his meeting that morning with Inspector Hake.

To all this the Baron listened intently and without comment, and as the narrative proceeded gradually transformed himself from the

midnight pie-eating companion to the conspirator-in-chief. "You would recognize this inspector and his sergeant anywhere and everywhere. I take it, disguise or no disguise? And they would recognize you, if they saw you in daylight? Good!" He thought for a moment, then went on: "I might have an amusing little job for you to-morrow, if you don't mind a day's walking. You don't, eh? You'd be only a decoy, drawing these fellows, or at least one of them, out of the way; but there may be some fun in it, particularly as you have a knack of falling into adventures here. You have, you know, just as if you were the hero of the piece, eh?"

"Perhaps I am," said Adam, who knew very well he was. "And I'm certainly at your service to-morrow, even if I've to walk from here to Scotland." And then he yawned and, stiff, tired beyond belief, struggled to his feet. There was only one of the day's splendid promises left now, and that was the last and perhaps the greatest—bed. He parted from the Baron at the foot of the stairs, up which he crawled with many an ache and wince, but in great contentment, a man of action, the mountain climbed, the wrecked crew saved, the invaders sent reeling back, all heroics performed, a man of action going to his sleep.

As he passed Nina's door, he was surprised to notice that there was still a light in her room, and felt a curious little twinge. He thought he heard a tiny scratching sound, as of a pen travelling rapidly across paper. Without thinking about the matter at all, he tried to make as little noise as possible, but he was too tired to control his movements properly and could not either open or close his door in silence. Would she hear him? He threw off his dressing-gown, and after making a brief attempt to clean himself, fell rather than climbed into bed. Would she knock again? As he slipped down between the delicious sheets, a cool wind rustled in from the night and he heard the first spatter of rain. But there came no more knocks on that wall, and he had just time to feel an odd relief before he sank into sleep.

CHAPTER NINE

THE STRATEGISTS

ADAM awoke to find that he was still the man of action of the previous night. It was disgracefully late, and he jumped briskly out of bed and went to the window. All the midsummer blue had been banished; the morning itself was cleared for action, presenting a grey arena for atheletic heroes. There was no rain at the moment, but obviously it had been falling heavily during the night and there was still more to come, for all the earth looked sodden and a cold sky loured and sagged with cloud. Adam regarded the landscape with stern approval for half a minute, then threw out his arms and twisted his trunk in the manner prescribed by Scandinavian strong men, gasped through the coldest bath the house could offer—and if there had been iced water he would have demanded it—and rubbed himself as if his body were one vast blot on the morning's grey page. He had been wise enough to pack a thick tweed suit and a pair of walking-boots, and in these he now accoutred himself and clattered down to breakfast.

There were several people hanging about in the hall, the Major, Mr. Brasure, Miss Satterly and one or two others, and they raised a buzz when they saw him. Evidently the Baron, for purposes of his own, had dropped a word about last night's adventures. The Major gave Adam a knowing look and a bluff word as from man to man; Miss Satterly and the others popped and simmered with exclamations and questions; and Adam, feeling a fool, tried to brush them politely aside with the air of a man who wanted nothing but his breakfast, and then perhaps after that, but only after that, another Troy to burn. At the door of the dining-room he ran into Sir Arthur and Siddell.

"Here's the hero of the midnight chase," said Siddell. Sir Arthur turned, gave Adam a little pat on the shoulder, and was about to make a speech when Siddell contrived, quite smoothly, to cut in with a question: "I didn't quite gather, Mr. Stewart—if

the question isn't impertinent—how you chanced to run into those fellows in the garden at that time? Weren't you in your dressing-gown? So the story runs."

Adam met his colourless gaze squarely. "I couldn't sleep," he replied, easily, "so went down into the garden for a breath of air."

"A touch of insomnia, eh?" Sir Arthur remarked. "I suffer from it myself at times." Though it was evident that he did nothing of the kind.

Siddell stared on and said "Ah!" with both mouth and eyes. Then he turned to Sir Arthur with a brisk change of manner: "I'm wondering, sir, if that business with Miss Bersieneff disturbed Mr. Stewart. Their rooms were next to one another, you know." His face moved round to show Adam a pair of innocent questioning eyebrows: and then turned back again to add casually: "Unless, of course, he had left his room before it happened." Slyness oozed from the fellow.

"I think I must have done," Adam remarked, "for I heard nothing of it in my room." It was pleasant to achieve at least verbal truth.

Sir Arthur's restless movement and his "Quite, quite!" did not give Siddell time to do more than raise his brows again and produce a tiny ambiguous smile before he moved away, leaving behind him a heap of queries as pale and faintly mocking as himself. It had been a puzzling encounter, but Adam felt pleased at his own part in it, and walked into the dining-room as a man of action who could on occasion stoop successfully to the cunning of the intriguer.

There he found only Mrs. Belville, lingering over tea and toast, and Peter, who was standing by the window smoking a cigarette, very straight and boyish in tweeds. He gave them his heartiest "Good morning!" feeling positive that he liked them immensely. Peter's appearance had his unqualified approval. It flashed upon him that she was the supreme creation of this rousing morning, the very queen of its steely territories and tumultuous air.

"Here's the young man who has all the adventures," cried Mrs. Belville. "I may tell you, Adam Stewart, that my niece is quite jealous."

"Don't be absurd," said Peter, perching herself on the arm of the nearest chair, "I'm not a bit. But you have been awfully lucky,

so far." And she looked across at him with something like serious reproach in her eyes.

"Have I?" It was a busy moment for Adam, who was beginning his breakfast and trying to look modestly incredulous, vaguely apologetic and adventurous all at the same time. "Surely you've had as many adventures as I have! What about the night before last? And then I thought you had some tremendous ones yesterday."

Before Peter had time to do more than shrug them away, her aunt briskly intervened: "You and your adventures! You both talk like the absurd infants you are. But Peter here won't be happy until she has crawled under hedges for miles with policemen after her. If there are no adventures—as you call them—to-day, while you are both careering round the wet countryside, I shall be sorry for you, Master Stewart." This speech, closing the nursery door upon them as it did, brought both her listeners nearer to one another, so that they even exchanged a quick smiling glance of sympathy and amusement behind that closed door.

"We are going out, then? Splendid!" Adam cried in great content, attacking his breakfast very fiercely.

"Yes, I'm waiting for you, and thought you were never coming," said Peter. "I'm quite ready."

"Sorry I'm so late." Adam looked at his watch. "Where is everybody this morning? Where's——"—he nearly said "Helen," but then remembered, with a curious little twinge—"Mrs. Maythorn?"

"Oh, Helen's had to take Nina down to Lobley in her car to catch the London express," Peter replied. "They had to go quite early."

"I heard something about Miss—er—Bersieneff," Adam remarked, very casually, "and have been wondering what it's all about." He caught them exchanging glances, noticed their confusion, and suddenly felt alarmed. What was coming?

"Well"—and Peter hesitated—"they found out, the Baron and Mr. Hooby and Sir Arthur—she was a kind of spy; they discovered this very late last night, and asked her some questions, and she had to go away at once, the first train this morning. And it was I who brought her here." She was genuinely distressed.

"Don't worry about that, my dear," said Mrs. Belville. "It was

a stupid fuss, and, naturally enough, rather unpleasant. The fact is, this Bersieneff girl was not at all what she pretended to be. She was not a royalist or exiled or anything of that kind. The Baron and Mr. Hooby suddenly remembered that they had come across her before, when she had another name, somewhere on the Riviera I think it was, and then she was a hanger-on to some revolutionary agents and a notorious and very undesirable person. Whether she was actually spying or not, obviously it was dangerous having her here, where she could pick up information for her friends or sell it to the highest bidder. Personally, I'm very glad she's gone. I had no idea that she was a spy or revolutionary agent or anything of that kind, but obviously she was a complete little minx."

"Oh, I'm not sorry about that," Peter exclaimed, "but only sorry I brought her here. But she pretended to be such an enthusiastic royalist that I hadn't the heart to refuse her when she begged to come. I met her in town and liked her enormously at first; she had had such an exciting life and was so different from the ordinary dull girl one meets; but the more I saw of her the less I really liked her. She was always talking about men, and wherever she went wondering whether she would meet any 'attractive men.' I hate girls who talk about *attractive men* like that."

"Quite right, my dear, a very sound instinct," said Mrs. Belville, looking at her approvingly. Adam followed with a rewarding glance of his own. Peter was quite right. He, too, he felt, hated girls who talked about "attractive men," and pronounced the words contemptuously to himself, throwing them after a dwindling Nina in the back of his mind.

The wind, which had been alternately whining and blustering for some time, now snatched up a capful of rain and flung it against the windows. Mrs. Belville rose from the table and nodded meaningly at the blurred panes. "Well, it looks to me," she observed, "as if your adventure of to-day will be nothing more nor less than a thorough soaking."

Peter had clearly heard such remarks before. "What does it matter?" she cried. "I'd rather have sodden clothes than a sodden spirit, and that's what you get if you don't do anything on days like this. Besides, if will probably clear up."

"My own point of view exactly," said Adam. "On a lovely day

like yesterday it doesn't matter if you do nothing"—and as he said it, he felt that he had done nothing yesterday—"but on this kind of day you must do something, must make something special happen, if only, you know, to keep your end up." And two more signatures and scarlet seals seemed to be added to the Peter-and-Adam pact.

"All you young people are so anxious now to keep your ends up," Mrs. Belville observed, "that I can't help suspecting that you haven't much confidence in your ends. They ought to be able to keep themselves up."

The Baron burst in to take command. "Here you are then!" He rubbed his hands with astonishing vigour and enfolded them all in a ring of very rapid and very bright little glances. "Nearly time to be off, unless we're going to have a downpour. That's no good, but take advantage of the first fine spell. You know what to do——" And he turned to Adam. "Go down to the village and look out for your man, Hake, or the other fellow, the sergeant, but preferably Hake, catch his eye, look busy, look important, let him overhear something if possible, and then he'll be after you. When you see you've hooked him, make for the moors, for the next dale there, Sillowdale, out of harm's way. If you can make an obvious chase of it before you've done, so much the better. A wild-goose chase, some would call it. Well, it's just the day for wild geese. But don't forget Hake's the man we want out of the way. You're both young and strong and supple, give him the chase of his life. Only take care you're not caught. I see you're both dressed for the occasion; but you'll need waterproofs, sticks, and some food. Some sandwiches in a rucksack, eh, Mrs. Belville?"

"Certainly they'll need some food. I'll arrange for them to have some sandwiches and things packed at once." And Mrs. Belville departed at once.

The Baron nodded hugely and profoundly, first at the closing door and then at Peter. "You can count upon those sandwiches being ready." He dropped his voice into a flattering confidential whisper. "A Golconda of a woman, your aunt, my dear Peter. I've known her for years, and have admired and marvelled more every year. If only she would take this business seriously now, she'd be worth a round dozen of our conspirators there, worth an army

corps, and with only two or three like her to help me, all them heart and soul in the cause, I would give you now the date of the coronation."

"I've heard her say sometimes that you don't take it all really seriously either, Baron," Peter remarked, quite coolly. Adam was abashed at her boldness, but the Baron twinkled above her lifted boyish head and looked at her with paternal indulgence. "Now that, my dear," he observed, wagging a fat forefinger, "shows you the limitation of her otherwise admirable mind and temperament. She reads me, as we all must do other people, by her own book and that, excellent volume as it is, you may say has not enough words. Nor has it the right words. They have meaning those words, but not atmosphere; you could make a legal code out of them but not a poem. Now, for example, Mr. Stewart here, who has been reading me by his own book these past two days, has not enough words by him, but he doesn't make your aunt's mistake and yours too, I fancy, simply because his words are the right words. Do you follow me? We are at cross-purposes, your aunt and I, perhaps you and I, perhaps you and your aunt on one side and Mr. Stewart—for I insist upon claiming him—and I on the other, because you divide the substance of life into two, sacred and secular, serious stuff and play, and so forth, whereas we see it as one substance all the time, so that if one bit seems sacred, then it's all sacred, if one bit is play, then it's all play, eh, Mr. Stewart?"

Adam agreed, and not entirely because he was flattered by the supposed likeness between them and by the appeal itself. Though his mind partly reflected the bewilderment on Peter's face, and he had not yet time to puzzle out the full significance of the remarks, yet there was something in them that compelled assent. He had noticed that division of things before, in his mother, for instance, and remembered being bewildered and oddly disturbed by it.

The Baron went to the window. "It's clearing now. Better be off as soon as you can. The point is, if it's pouring with rain as you pass through the village, Hake might not see you or, if he did see you, might hesitate to follow."

"But why should be follow us?" asked Peter. And Adam supported her with, "Mightn't he think we're merely going for a walk?" They were standing fairly close together as they asked these questions, and the Baron in reply clapped a hand on Peter's

shoulder and then on Adam's and wagged his huge head over the pair of them. "My children, you are beautiful but not bright this morning," he mourned; and then more briskly: "You've not given this game of hide-and-seek sufficient thought. Consider the situation. We await a certain person who, we know, has set out for this place, but who is being, or has been, closely watched. I gather that he has now contrived to shake off the secret service men, detectives, or whoever they are. Their game is not to come charging in here, arresting everybody and so forth, because that would make too much fuss; their game is to prevent this person reaching us, possibly, too, to ship him out of the country, so that all our efforts are brought to nothing without a word of it reaching the public. Now I imagine they've not had time yet to blockade this house, for most of them are still looking for their man somewhere in the Midlands, where he gave them the slip. Therefore, Hake, who is probably in charge here, must do what he can by himself. He knows the situation here, and he sees the pair of you, looking very concerned and important and so on, making for Sillowdale. You are the two youngest and most active members of the party. He will jump to the conclusion that you are meeting someone in Sillowdale and bringing him here across the moors, with all the appearance of three young people merely returning from a walk. That would be the obvious approach, and his mind, you may be sure, runs to meet the obvious. This will give us a clear day here, and we have some clan leaders arriving from the north to-day and some other friends, and, meanwhile, when Mrs. Maythorn returns with her car, I can go with her down the dale and south, perhaps to Harrogate, where there will be at least a message. I rely on your youthful but almost satanic ingenuity to bait the line that will drag our friend the Inspector across the highest and wettest part of those moors. And now, make yourselves ready, my children, and be off, and good luck go with you."

He left them happily freighted with policy, and, as eye travelled to eye and smile answered smile, with their pact as companions in adventure finally signed and sealed. Adam bustled upstairs to fetch the small rucksack lying at the bottom of his bag, and then to find his raincoat and a stick. With these he was complete, and he returned to discover Peter awaiting him in the hall, also complete with a close-fitting brown felt hat, a waterproof, and stout

little shoes. She stood there, erect, trim, outwardly very self-possessed, but the concealed excitement delicately flushing her cheeks, a resolute little girl suddenly grown up; and as her clear grey eyes looked up and met his, he felt suddenly elated to think that they were to be travelling companions for the rest of the day.

"I'm quite ready. Are you?" She was very crisp, serious.

"Quite. What about sandwiches, though?"

"They're coming now," Peter replied. "You've got a rucksack for them? What about your hat?"

"Never wear one on these occasions. They're only a nuisance.' And then he smiled, and she smiled too, but in the midst of her smile a sudden confusion faintly mantled her cheeks, so she frowned and looked a trifle annoyed with herself, as if she had just done something foolish. It was one of those odd little passages that are over and done with in a second or so, have no apparent meaning, and yet seem curiously significant.

A door opened. It was Mrs. Belville with the sandwiches. She came forward, a paper package in each hand, and surveyed them both smilingly. "Sandwiches and some fruit, enough to sustain you until dinner but no longer, so see that you don't get lost or locked up." She handed over the packages and Adam stowed them away in his bag.

"Can you put these in, too?" asked Peter, and slipped in two coloured packets. "It's chocolate, and awfully useful. Last year a man broke his leg on a mountain and lived for days and days on just one packet of chocolate he happened to have with him."

"Just the stuff!" Adam agreed heartily, lovingly patting the rucksack before he fastened the straps. He saw the two of them eating that chocolate together in some high, windy place, with the curlews crying and the mists swirling round them and streams and wet rock gleaming a thousand feet below.

"You're nothing more than a pair of absurd dressed-up babies," Mrs. Belville cried, looking from one to the other, with the queerest little suggestion of emotion stirring in her eyes and deepening the laughter in her voice. It must have been this that gave her the surprising impulse to lean forward and kiss Peter. "Be off with you! I'm tired of seeing you both look so important, thinking about your policemen and your chocolate. And don't lose yourselves!" And thus returning comfortable to her usual

attitude of genial contempt, she hustled them out and waved them away.

They swung down the road to the village, a sharp westerly wind hooting in their ears, a watery sun and a thin grey scud above, and before them pale glittering fields curving beyond into blue-green sullen mounds of hill and moor. With a sense of happy release, Adam surveyed the vast curved edge of High Moor, over which they must pass to Sillowdale. Through the vaporous air, sending a thin drift of mist like smoke across the tops, the hillside looked enormous, as if it stood erect for once to the full height of its two thousand and some hundred feet, tightening beneath its thin worn covering of loose soil, turf and heather, the muscles and sinews of its ancient and enduring rock. He seemed to hear it, as he had seemed to hear so many mountains, baying out its challenge through the frightened air, and his heart lifted up to answer it. The old happy lust of conquest over grim upland leagues once more possessed him. He turned to glance at Peter, marching in silence by his side, and thought he saw something kindling in her face. He longed to share his present mood, or, if not that, to discover what was stirring in her mind, but now a sudden shyness descended upon him, just as it seemed to have descended upon her. The feeling of fellowship that the others in the house had involuntarily revealed to them had now departed; and out here ogether, they were once more almost strangers, proud, shy.

"I thought the Baron seemed quite different to-day," Adam began. "But then he seems different every day, though, of course, I've only known him three days. But this morning he seemed more brisk and business-like and not so—what shall I say?—fantastic."

"I know. He does change," she replied, easily, "and sometimes he's very absurd and tiresome, and it's impossible to understand half the things he says, and you feel he's simply making fun of you. But this morning, when he explained things so simply and sensibly, he was at his best and I really liked him. When I came up here on Monday, I was furious with him—about the whiskers and all that sort of thing—and thought he was going to spoil everything, in spite of all the work he does, but now he's much better and we have a chance of doing something."

Adam was curious. "Have you known him long?"

"Ages. Father and mother knew him before I was born. But I've only seen him off and on because he's spent most of his time away from England. He made a lot of money very quickly years ago—something to do with a concession in South America, I think it was—and since then has been in all kinds of conspiracies and schemes, mostly abroad, and has lost a good deal of his money. He's been all over, and had the most weird adventures and met the weirdest people—men have all the luck, I think, though most of them don't take advantage of it—and if you once set him going, he can begin anywhere in his life and go on for hours and hours, just like the man in Conrad. I've listened to him for whole nights, and he really has had a marvellous life. But sometimes he's very irritating and ridiculous, and you never know when he's telling the truth, he can make everything seem so queer."

"Why is he called the Baron? What's he a Baron of?"

Peter reflected a moment. "It's either Portugal or one of those South American states, Portugal, I think."

"But surely he's not Portuguese," Adam pursued, "even though he doesn't seem quite English?"

"Oh, no! He was simply made a baron after one of his adventures, as a reward. He's half English and half French, or at least part French. I don't like Frenchmen as a rule, particularly the little thin mouthing ones, who seem to lick their lips over you and are all scented. But you must have noticed that there's a special type of Frenchman quite different from the others, a big, fat, double bass kind of man, that you can't help liking. And the Baron sometimes reminds me of that kind of Frenchman."

"I know," said Adam, though he was not sure that he did. There was, however, no time for more, for they had turned the last corner and come within sight of the bridge and beyond that the village. Adam stared down the road, at the same time slackening his pace. "We had better slow up a little," he explained, "for now comes the only really ticklish part of the whole day's job. I've got to spot Hake and then somehow we've got to arouse his suspicions." He had half expected to meet one or other of them at the bridge, and he was a little disappointed to find that there was nobody there. "Let's hope we see him somewhere in the village," he remarked, a trifle gloomily, "or I don't know what we shall have to do."

"Nor I," returned Peter, following his thought. "Obviously

if we merely hang about the village waiting for them to find us, and they might easily see us without our seeing them, or they might not be there at all, then the whole plan falls through."

They crossed the bridge and walked forward at a moderate pace into the village itself. The first short street offered them an old man, two women and a few children, but nobody even faintly resembling either Hake or Rundle. Adam found it no easy task to look here, there and everywhere, even into the windows as they passed, and yet not appear to be doing anything more than walking on in the ordinary way; and with every yard they covered his excitement grew. The next street, he remembered, was the post-office one that led into the square, and he braced himself to be ready for it when they turned the corner. His first glance was towards the post-office. A small cart stood before the door. Its owner or driver, an elderly rustic, was seated in the cart talking to a man standing at the door. But who was the man at the door? Surely it was Rundle! And who was that in the cart? Could it be Hake? Two more strides sufficed to convince him that it was, and that he was wearing the same disguise he had worn at the bridge.

In his excitement Adam grabbed Peter by the arm, and was about to whisper his discovery when she cried, "Don't do that!" and shook her arm free of his grasp.

There is no outraged innocence like that of a man who has known what it was on other occasions to be guilty. Adam was furious, but there was no time now to indulge in feeling. "Sorry, but you don't understand," he muttered. "Don't look about you now." Undoubtedly they had been seen, and he had been recognized. He had just time to notice that Rundle had retreated into the doorway and that Hake had his back almost ostentatiously turned to the road. He whipped out his pocket-map of the district and an odd scrap of paper, and pretended to show them to his companion while he babbled of their mythical enterprise. "Here's the very place you see," he cried. "But how to get to it from here is the difficulty. Do we go straight over the top there? What do you make of it?" And hardly knowing what he was saying, he handed the map to Peter, who was still looking bewildered but contrived to carry through her minor part. A moment's more babbling and display of anxious and important looks and they

were past the cart and its eavesdroppers. Ahead, at the corner where the street turned into the square, there was a lad lounging, and the sight of him gave Adam an idea. "Don't look back," he whispered, pretending to examine the map in her hand.

He stopped at the corner and asked the lad to direct him to Sillowdale. He was told to cross the square, follow the main road for a little way, then turn to the left down a side road or cart track that wound its way up the hillside and over the moor. While listening to these directions, he ventured the tiniest casual glance down the street. Rundle was climbing into the cart.

They marched briskly across the square, but no sooner had they turned the corner into the main road than Adam called a halt. Crouching down he peered round to see what was happening in the square, and sure enough, his little extra precautionary ruse had succeeded, for there at the opposite corner was the cart, and Hake was having some talk with the lad. Adam sprang to his feet, crying, "We've done it!" and hurried Peter along the road.

"That's why—I asked—the way," he explained, breathlessly as they strode along. "I thought they'd ask—what it was we wanted—and then that would confirm what they'd overheard."

"Are you sure they were the detectives, then?" she asked, turning a troubled face towards him.

"Of course they were! I knew them at once. And now they're after us, both of them, and everything's all right." He glowed with triumph, "Don't turn round, but step quietly and listen." There was a distant rumble of a cart behind them. "Hear that!" he cried, jubilant. "The wild-goose chase has begun." He could have danced down the road.

Peter could not resist either the moment's triumph or the infection of her companion's high spirits, and she glowed with him. "I think—you were splendid," she panted, for she too was breathless and they were hurrying down the road at a great pace. "You managed it—wonderfully." And then after a little pause, during which a fine feminine conscientiousness demanded that she should not leave the personal relation unsettled, she added: "I'm sorry. I nearly spoilt it all."

He remembered then that he was very angry with her and told himself that he was not to be so easily mollified. It was, however, difficult to recall and enjoy his resentment, particularly now that

there was so much else to enjoy; but he hastily told himself that for the rest of the day he would be the stern leader of the expedition, the cool, sexless, slightly mocking companion. He found himself replying lightly: "Not a bit. After all, you know, it was a really tense moment." Perhaps it was fortunate that they had now arrived at the point where the rough track to Sillowdale swept to the left to meander between fields and then zig-zag up the hill. A little worn signpost, the very imprint for the volume of rough weather and great upland walks, pointed the way. As they turned down this side-road, a casual glance behind revealed two heads bobbing up and down above the walls. Law and order were jogging in pursuit.

CHAPTER TEN

THE WILD GEESE

THE knowledge that they were being pursued, and the sight of the green track, grey-edged with low stone walls, stretching before them, winding up and up until it was lost in the trailing mists, sent their spirits soaring. Involuntarily they increased their pace. The sun had now withdrawn altogether and there was a gathering menace in the sky. The wind howled down the narrow channel at the head of the valley. There was an occasional lash of rain, chill stinging drops, and bleak salty air came swirling down between the showers. As he swung along, Adam held up his head and sniffed in delight, and there came back to him, in one of those oddly poignant flashes, a remembrance of himself trying to capture this very scent, the wet moorland smell, only two days before, standing in St. Pancras or in the corridor of the train, a dusty blue day all round him. Peter had been there, just before or just afterwards, grey eyes looking up at the carriage window. And now she was here, stepping out beside him! He looked at her as if to reassure himself that she really was there, and then he looked again, this time because he was wondering how she was feeling about the adventure now in the face of cold wind and rain. He told himself that everybody was not enraptured at the mere thought of wet rocks and mist and sodden leagues of moorland.

She read the thought behind his glance. "Don't worry," she said, a trifle shortly. "I'm loving it."

"So am I. Do you really like—this?" And he waved his stick at the vague majesty of hill and cloud.

"I adore it," she returned promptly; and then thawing in the warmth of a genuine enthusiasm, she continued: "It's the only kind of country I really do like, and this is the best kind of day for it, I think. Father and I have come up here, not just here, you know, but to the Dales and the Lakes, for years and years, and we've walked miles on days worse than this, sometimes in the snow."

Of course he ought to have known that she felt like that about it; she was so perfectly set in the scene and the day; and the thought warmed him towards her. "Splendid! I'm glad of that," he cried, without patronage. "This country gives me a thrill I never get from the fat settled land in the southern counties."

"I know. I hate that country. It's too fat and soft, not real country at all."

"No, it's not; just one big sleepy farm and garden, with everything tamed for centuries, touching its hat at you," he added in a fine fierce growl.

"Full of pink little curates," she went on, "and sloppy novelists and tea-parties and tennis and colonels' widows and maiden aunts——"

"Stringy old snobs who spend all their time trying to cheat at bridge——"

This duet, such a safe and delightful affair that they did not end it until their contemptuous cataloguing had obviously passed the most indulgent bounds, carried them half-way up the hill, with the cart still in attendance not more than six or seven hundred yards behind. Hake was obviously making no attempt to overtake them, though it was doubtful if he really possessed any advantage on that rough, winding track; but he might soon try to catch up, or on the other hand, faced with such threatening weather, he might possibly abandon the pursuit. Feeling hungry, Adam looked at his watch and saw that it was nearly one o'clock. "I'll tell you what," he began, after a pause, "I think we'll change our tactics." Peter, too, it seemed, had thought of that. "They might give it up," she remarked, nodding at the rolling black clouds. "Why not pretend now to notice that we're being followed." That was Adam's notion too, and they plotted together enthusiastically. A little further up, they would stop, point to the cart, "register alarm," as Peter put it, and then make hastily for the open moor in the hope of finding some path that would lead them safely past rock and morass over the top into Sillowdale.

They had hardly congratulated themselves on the plan of action when they noticed, to the right a little way in front, a gap in the wall and beyond it a faint narrow track that went sharply up the hill. Opposite this gap they halted and went through their agreed performance with the most elaborate and satisfying gestures, after

which they made what speed they could away from the road. Their rate of progress, however, was far slower on the steep, spongy ground they were treading now, and they seemed hardly more than two hundred yards from the gap when they turned and saw the cart stopping there. After a consultation, one figure jumped down, clearly with the intention of following them on foot, and the cart rumbled forward up the main track. All excitement, they waited no longer.

"Now for the wild geese——" Adam cried, swinging round.

"In flight." And Peter, shaking the raindrops from her little hat, laughed and broke delightedly into a short run, like a slender wild thing. Adam caught up to her, and together they clambered up the slope on the rapidly vanishing track, sometimes slipping on the treacherous surface, sometimes catching a foot in the innumerable spongy holes, sometimes sliding on a wet stone. But they were gaining with every stride. The clouds swept down to meet them, and very soon they had lost all sight of the summit before them and of the track behind. They moved in a little hollow ghostly place in the mist, and there was no sound but the drip-drip of water and the far mournful crying of the birds. All direction was obliterated; they could only make for the steepest practicable slope within sight; and once they were badly bogged and had to pull squelching shoes out of the brown slime and then jump from one hard tuft to the next until they reached firm ground again.

At last there were no more slopes in view and they seemed to have reached the summit. Slowly now, and very quietly, shadows in a high ghostly place, they walked on level ground. Then Adam, who was beginning to feel chilled, a trifle tired and very hungry, stopped and held up his hand. They listened for a moment. "He's lost us, and himself too, I imagine," Adam almost whispered. "And incidentally, we don't know which way to go. I wish I had a compass." Peter fumbled in the pocket of her waterproof and very surprisingly produced from it a tiny compass, which they examined together. "What's our direction?" she whispered. There was no necessity to whisper, but instinctively they had lowered their voices in this spectral world. "Anything northish," Adam replied, "so that we don't go back on our tracks. We'll head due north, straight for Sillowdale." Still blanketed in mist, they crossed what appeared to be the plateau of the summit, and

then found themselves at the edge of a gradual descent, very boggy and thick-sown in places with small sharp rocks. As they stumbled on, the mist thinned so that they could see a little further ahead, but the valley below was not visible yet, and they descended into a mystery.

"Lord! but I'm hungry," Adam cried at last, and it was as if his confession had given a signal of release to Peter, for she immediately admitted that she was both hungry and tired. It seemed senseless to hurry away any longer from a pursuer who had completely vanished, who might have been left in another world, so they agreed to call a halt. A rude stone shelter, probably used by shepherds, suddenly appeared a little way below to the right, and they flung themselves down on the floor inside and ravened their sandwiches and fruit. It was not until Adam had filled a pipe and Peter had lit a cigarette that they began to talk, and even then it was only in fragmentary remarks. A triumphant peace came with the first few puffs of smoke. An air of achievement filled the queer little place. From time to time, they regarded one another calmly and happily, feeling sure of themselves in a deep companionship that only turned shy and treacherous when it came up to the surface of words.

"It's much clearer," Peter remarked, looking out and throwing away her cigarette. "What's next?"

Adam struggled to his feet, chilled, damp and rather stiff. "Oh, Sillowdale, don't you think? We said we'd go there and we will. Anyhow, it'll be safer if Hake or the other fellow is still prowling around."

"For that matter, he might have caught us here."

"I know. But he's probably lost up there, or half-way back, cursing our heads off. Let's be going, shall we?" And he slung his rucksack over his shoulder and marched out. They could see right down into the valley now, but it was obviously only a part of the whole dale, just a green vacant length between two spurs of the hill they were descending. A sudden weak shaft of sunlight set it glittering here and there, and at last showed them a few isolated farms in the distance, and immediately below, perhaps a mile and a half away, a house of some kind. This offered them an objective, and being aimless now they accepted it, knowing that it is dull work walking towards nothing. "Besides," Peter added,

"there'll probably be a path going down to it." To her delight there was, and they were soon striding and slipping and hopping down it, with the house ever in view.

"There's no sign of that main track," Adam remarked, staring about him. "I wonder what became of the cart?"

"I'm beginning to believe there never was a cart or detective or anything. I feel I've dreamt them, and now I'm just having the usual long scrambling walk, the usual jolly wet exploration." She was silent a moment, then resumed with a more meditative air. "But no, when I think of it, the adventure part has made a tremendous lot of difference. It's not really been the main thing, but it's rounded everything off. It's what I've always wanted to happen in places like this, you know; a romantic pursuit, with me on the lawless side."

Adam was interested. "I was feeling that, too, particularly when we first got into the mist. It was an escape all round. I felt as if Hake and Rundle were part, only this time a very active and conscious part, of something I've always escaped from, or wanted to escape from, when I came to these places."

"The places themselves feel it and help you, I think," she went on slowly, thinking it out and producing the actual words rather shyly. "Helen—my cousin, Mrs. Maythorn, you know—always tells me I'm a barbarian, and perhaps I am. She's tremendously civilized, accepts all the limitations and works within them, and does better because they are there, if you see what I mean, like a poet with a sonnet. I want to escape from them all, and this untamed kind of country that won't be settled and neatly marked out, helps enormously. Look at the way, for instance, sex drops on you as soon as you go down there. That's one of the things—and it's a very complicated one—that you don't have to trouble yourself about, but I have, even now, for all their talk. There's a place marked out for me, all snug and comfortable, no doubt, down there, and even if I refuse to fit in, if I struggle out, I find myself in another; if you refuse to become one kind of girl, you become another kind, always some kind. And try as you will, you can't escape, at least not down there, sitting about. First they say you're this or that type, and then you find you are . . ."

Her final words were torn out of her mouth and sent shrieking down the valley by a great gust of wind. Immense black clouds

that had been piled up in the western sky now bore down upon the hill. The wind suddenly dropped; a few birds went darkly clamouring through the brooding hollow of space; there was a moment's trembling quiet; a heavy splash here and there; and then the steely obliterating torrent. Drenched and blind, Adam and Peter ran and slipped and staggered down a track that was rapidly becoming a rushing mountain stream. "We'll have to get down there," Adam bellowed, pointing in the direction of the house below, hardly visible now through the quivering white shafts of rain. Peter nodded, ran forward incautiously and nearly fell headlong, only just saving herself by throwing all her weight on one muddied arm. Adam rushed up to give her a hand, but she laughed him away and contrived to rise and join him, slightly limping as she moved on again. "You're limping," he roared, fatuously, though with genuine concern in his glance. She made an impatient little grimace, shook her head, sending a shower of raindrops whirling, and hurried along pushing back wet strands of hair and dabbing her streaming face with a tiny handkerchief. Adam was similarly engaged, pressing his hands down over his soaked bare head like a man just out of water. They could hardly see, and went slipping at every stride, but it was not long before they were almost at the bottom of the hill and on easier, firmer ground.

By this time it was lighter, and the first torrential sheets of water had dwindled and passed into an ordinary steady downpour. They could see the house very plainly now. It was larger than the usual dalesman's cottage, a solid square stone building with one side fronting the hill without any intervening wall or garden space. This was obviously the back, and there were outhouses and some sort of garden at the other side. As they came up to it, their pace gradually slackened until finally, debating what to do, they came to a halt not more than a few steps from the nearest window. There were no signs of life about the place, no hint of warmth and welcome; it stood there, deep in a lost world of rain and wind, old and grey and blind-eyed.

Adam regarded it dubiously, and then looked up and down the valley. "We'd better ask for shelter, don't you think?"

"Of course." Peter shook herself, shivering a little. "Surely they'll let us sit by the fire, if there is one, and dry our things.

And we could probably get some tea. Couldn't you drink some boiling-hot tea?"

"Gallons of it," Adam replied, but without enthusiasm. "I doubt though if we shall get any. Somehow this place doesn't look like tea."

"No, it doesn't look very cosy," she admitted. And then, after a little pause: "In fact, it looks—rather sinister."

Adam had been glancing up and down the dale again, and threw out: "Perhaps there's no one there; houses with no one in them often look like that."

"Oh, yes, there's someone in," Peter remarked, quite calmly, "because I've just caught a glimpse of a face at that window, the nearer one on the first floor. I noticed a curtain shaking first, and then a vague face. They've been watching us some time, I think."

"They're wondering what to do with the body, I suppose; or fixing up the gadget that comes down and smothers you in the old four-poster bed. That's the kind of place it is or ought to be." And he eyed it almost regretfully. "But actually they're probably wondering whether we're coming in to tea and, if so, whether they dare ask us eighteenpiece each. Anyhow, that settles it." He led the way round to the side of the house. "There came a thundering knock on the door," he mouthed; and Peter took him up: "Two travellers benighted by the storm—is that right?—it sounds wrong —craved admittance." They were now facing a tumble-down garden and some outhouses, enclosed not by the usual wall but by rusty old railings, very dreary in the rain. A small iron gate and a flagged path pointed the way to a side-door. This was good enough. Adam held open the gate, and they marched up the path side by side, but they were still several yards from the door when it suddenly opened and an old woman, in a red shawl and looking like a witch, came creeping out. They stopped short and stared.

"Will you be wanting shelter, young man?" the crone called out, in a high wheezy voice, before they had moved or opened their mouths. As soon as they admitted the fact, she cried: "This way then, just for a minute or two," and beckoning them to follow, she hobbled across to the nearest outhouse, a few yards away, and threw open the door, holding it while they passed inside. It was a dim little place with only one window, and that window small, dirty, and set high up in the wall, and for the rest it was crowded

with odds and ends, lamps, empty bottles, old gardening tools, broken plant pots, odd chair legs, dusty harness, and the like, and smelt unpleasantly of mould and paraffin. Still a little dazed, they had just time to remark the character of the place when its dim light was transformed to downright gloom by the door being closed behind them. The next moment they heard the sound of the key being turned in the lock outside, a little cackle, footsteps hobbling away, the banging of a door, and then nothing but the dreary patter of the rain.

For a moment they stood there, silent, unstirring, lost in that musty gloom, through which there moved fantastic shapes out of the depths of memory. Tales long gone out of mind came flickering back, and it seemed as if they had only to loosen their hold upon common reality for a second or so, to let things give but one more queer little shake, and that old world of sinister faerie would come creeping round them. Then they hastened to break the spell. Peter achieved a short brave laugh. Adam tried the door. "It really is locked, you know," he remarked, very casually. "That's rather queer. Does she think we may steal something?"

"I believe she's a witch," said Peter, lightly.

"So do I. And I feel like our Mr. Hansel, of that unfortunate firm, Messrs. Hansel and Gretel."

"If we looked out of the little window there," she said, "we should probably find that the moors and everything had gone and that miles and miles of those creepy beech-woods had grown up all round us."

She had found an old chair and, after removing her dripping hat and waterproof, had rather dubiously perched herself upon it. Adam contrived a seat out of an upturned bucket and a piece of board, and settled down to enjoy one of those delicious pipes that offer themselves after wind and rain. He was not so thoroughly soaked as he had imagined himself to be, but he was stiff and chilled and had to mop his head with his handkerchief to prevent little cold streams trickling down his neck. His eyes had now grown accustomed to this dim interior, and he looked across at Peter with unsmiling but friendly curiosity. He liked the way she sat there frankly offering herself to his regard, without any one of the usual feminine wriggling and titivating yourself, all with cries

of "What a sight I must look!" Oddly enough, he had no sooner thought this than she gave what seemed to be a slightly impatient shrug, and demanded a dry cigarette. He handed one over, struck a match for her, and as they both bent forward, he remarked her heightened colour, the rather thick, level brows, darker than her hair, the full square little chin poised above the fine delicate neck. She was very obviously damp, muddy, and slightly bedraggled, and yet, by some curious chance, the assaults of wind and rain had somehow transformed what he remembered as a boyish and rather colourless charm, nothing more, into something like real beauty.

The thought made it rather embarrassing to return her direct even gaze. They had contrived to patronize their first queer little mood out of existence, and now he dropped easily into common reality. "I suppose she'll be back in a minute, full of apologies, having locked away all her silver spoons," he remarked, staring about him.

Peter did not reply for a moment. Then she caught and held his eye, and said very quietly: "Do you know, I've a feeling that she won't. It's absurd, of course, but I feel sure that we're imprisoned here."

He took his pipe out of his mouth. "That certainly is absurd. Why should we be?"

"I don't know," she replied. "But I feel it in my bones, my wild-goose's bones. It's a trap; another of your adventures. Not that I mind, you know; I like it; but there it is." And with an air of calm finality she leaned back and gently blew out a column of smoke. "You'll see."

So far he certainly did not see. He would not admit to himself that he was even vaguely impressed, nevertheless he suddenly felt restless and did not resist an impulse to get up and look about him. He peered into corners, taking stock of the place, and moved around rather noisily, occasionally aiming a kick at various odd articles that were strewn about the floor. Then a sudden gesture from Peter, who had kept still and quiet in her chair, pulled him up.

"Listen!" She stared up at him. "I heard footsteps outside."

And now he could hear them, too. But nothing happened at the door, and he felt a queer rush of anger. "Damn their cheek!" he cried. "We'll let them know we're still here." And he rattled

the handle of the door, and let out a loud "Hello!" There was a moment's silence while they waited to see what would happen.

Then a noise at the little window swung him round. Peter jumped to her feet. The window opened from the bottom and the catch must have been on the outside, for someone there now lifted it up, and the next moment a face was framed in the opening and a great triumphant nose poked itself into the room.

"I thought I was not mistaken." It was as if the nose itself were addressing them. "My young fellow-passenger, Mr.—er—Stewart, I think, whom I saw last in the custody of the police, and who afterwards escaped, I believe. I've heard something since about you and your friends. I know what you are trying to do to this unhappy country, and I know my duty. You have now, I hope, made a salutary if unpleasant discovery, that law and order cannot be set at defiance even in this remote place."

When he first realized that the crown and summit of this adventure was nothing less than Canon Drewbridge's nose, Adam had wanted to laugh, but towards the conclusion of this characteristic speech he became both alarmed and indignant. "You've no right to keep us here, Canon Drewbridge," he cried up at the window. "What are you going to do with us?"

The Canon chuckled, clearly delighted with himself. "You wanted shelter—I saw that when I first noticed you staring at the house—and you shall have shelter. You and your—er—companion, this misguided young girl, who is even now, I imagine, regretting her folly——"

"Don't be absurd!" Peter broke in, furiously. "I'm not regretting anything."

"Possibly not," the Canon continued, drily, "but perhaps you will, young lady. I believe that the pair of you are here on some unlawful errand—the choice of such a day as this for a visit only confirms my belief—and it is my intention, as I believe it is my duty, to detain you here while I communicate with the proper authorities. There is, you will be interested to learn, a telephone about two miles away, and I think our friend the Inspector, who has given me more of his confidence since I saw you last, will be pleased to receive a message. There are, too—er—other interested persons, as you will soon discover for yourselves. I am not going to see sense and decency and order flouted, perhaps the whole

country dragged to ruin, under my very nose, without taking some steps to prevent it. And this is one of the steps." Then very quickly he withdrew his head, lowered and fastened the window, and disappeared.

"But who is he, and what does he know about it?" Peter gasped

"It's Canon Drewbridge. Don't you remember, he travelled up from town in the same carriage as your father and I? I told you about him." And he described once more his previous encounter with the Canon. "He always sees plots and revolutions everywhere," he went on to explain, "and he'll simply be loving this. When you think of it, it was rather smart of the old boy to spot us like that and then send out his private witch or whatever else she is to lure us in and lock us up."

"What an interfering, pompous old beast!" She still crackled with fury. "The way he talked! I've not met anyone for years I loathed so much on sight. He's all the things I hate rolled into one."

"I'm surprised you didn't know about him before," Adam remarked. "He's quite a celebrity. And this is just the kind of thing he would do." And then, feeling suddenly oracular, he added: "After all, he's been shutting people up in smelly little lumber-rooms all his life." He would have continued in this vein, but just then there came a noise from outside that aroused his curiosity. The rain had washed the little window during the time it had been raised above the Canon's head, and by mounting upon the bench that stood against the wall underneath, he could now look out. He did look out, and was just in time to see the Canon, resolute in oilskins, his nose an imperial triumph, wheeling an old bicycle through the gate. Evidently he did not mean to lose any time.

"He'll be telephoning in about half an hour," Adam observed, after jumping down and giving Peter the news.

Her first flush of anger had departed and she had sat down again, looking rather pale and tired. She received his news in a dismayed silence, but then, before he had time to say anything more, a sudden impulse brought her to her feet, crying: "Oh, Adam! What shall we do?"

It sent him towering. "We'll get out of here somehow, even if it means burning the door down with this beastly paraffin." He

was tremendously determined and emphatic. And then he looked at her again and changed his tone. "That is, if you're game. After all, you know"—for she had made an impatient gesture—"no great harm will come of it even if they find us here. They won't really do anything but worry you with questions."

"You're being ridiculous!" She looked quite annoyed. "You know very well we must get out of here. It doesn't matter what they will do with us, we're not going to remain here to see. I should never forgive myself if we did."

Adam was beginning to feel apologetic. "My own attitude entirely," he admitted. "Only I thought—well——"

"I knew it was," she broke in. "It's the only attitude. But then you go and spoil it by thinking that I would probably feel different about it, would want to sit here until they came and then smile sweetly at them?"

How touchy she was! And if it was not for that one weakness, what a perfect companion for an adventure! "Sorry!—Peter." She betrayed no sign of having heard her name from him for the first time. "I ought to have known you'd feel like that," he went on; and then, more energetically: "Yes, we must get out of here if only to wipe that lordly grin off his face."

She began looking about her. "Let's hurry, hurry! What about the window?"

He followed her glance and shook his head. "I've thought about that and it's useless. It's fastened on the outside, to begin with, and even then, if we could force it open or break it and then unfasten the catch, it's awkwardly high up and too small."

She eyed it reflectively. "I can get through nearly anything. Perhaps I could scramble out and then unlock the door—that is, if the key's still in the lock, and I think it is."

"So do I," said Adam. "I never heard her withdrawing it. But I'm certain you couldn't get through that window. No, the door's the only chance. We must concentrate on the door." He began to fill his pipe as he moved across.

Peter regarded these preparations with mingled disgust and indignation. "Oh, don't begin smoking! This isn't a time for smoking. We must hurry."

"Just the moment for a pipe," he replied, puffing away. Her impatience added a pleasant flavour of superior wisdom to his

tobacco. "We've got to think. But before thinking——" He broke off to give the door a violent pushing kick with the sole of his heavy boot. The lock held firm, "Just as I thought," he remarked. "It hardly rattled. Quite a stout door, this."

"Couldn't we use something as a battering-ram, and heave together?" She had now joined him at the door.

"Wait a minute." He bent forward to examine it more closely and lit a match. "Look! It's an old house door, and though it's obviously a tough old boy, it's got panels, and we might be able to make a hole there." And he pointed to the corner nearest the lock. "Then we could slip an arm through and if she really has left the key in, we can turn it. I believe burglars do that sometimes."

"I'm sure she did leave the key." Her voice rose in her excitement. "Come on, let's find some things to make the hole."

Their first discovery was a stump of candle on the bench, and with its flame held out before them, they went peering together into corners and poking about among the dusty litter until finally they had acquired a little heap of tools, including an axe, a hammer, two saws, both rusty and one of them far too big to be of any service, a chisel, and several indeterminate pieces of iron. Urgent as the moment seemed to them and engrossed as they were, there was still some part of them detached from it, merely sitting back and appraising its quality, for once their eyes met and a question flashed between them, and Peter smiled and said "I'm loving it," and Adam smiled back and admitted that he was too. He thought he would remember this moment for ever; this Rembrandtesque interior of a tiny golden wavering light and huge sprawling shadows, the bright medallion of Peter's head, the treasure hunt among the dusty lumber; here, behind this locked door, a tiny world all their own, a warm glow of companionship and rich romance, and outside, under the rain they heard pattering on the roof, the cold desolate hills and the empty valley. Yet, so oddly tangled and contradictory are things, this was anything but their own world, here was their prison, its mean walls the very symbols of all they detested, whereas there outside, in no matter what grey desolation of hill and sky, was heart's desire.

He delivered a blow with the axe at the bottom corner of the

panel nearest the lock. The axe remained in the wood, and by the time he had recovered it with a sharp wrench, he had left a long crack. Two more blows delivered in the same place produced a little shower of splinters and widened the crack.

"What a row!" exclaimed Peter, as she bent over the door with the candle in her hand. "Suppose the old woman or somebody hears it?"

Adam was looking round for the hammer and chisel. "Then we're probably dished," he replied. "They'll come and take away the key, to begin with. But perhaps there's only the old woman there, and she's probably deaf and pottering about in the house. We've got to risk her hearing us." He began using the chisel to widen the crack, and then wedged in sundry pieces of iron, which he hammered to such purpose that soon there was a hole large enough to admit the smaller saw. Having only about half an inch of space to work in, however, he failed to make much impression on the wood with oblique sawing, and returned to the axe, with the full approval of Peter, now dancing with impatience and eager to attack the door herself. The next few blows, aimed a little to the left of the crack, discovered a soft, worm-eaten area, and the wood came flying away, leaving a hole several inches square at the base. Adam stepped back and flung away the axe.

"My turn now!" Peter cried, pulling up her sleeves. Before he had time to interfere, she had thrust a long slender arm through the hole and was busy groping for the key. "I can just touch it with the ends of my fingers," she grasped, "but I can't turn it." With a final effort, bending over to the left as far as she could, wincing but resolute, she contrived to thrust her arm further in and curve her hand further round. "Got it!" And once more they heard the key turn in the lock. It was a sorely-bruised arm, marked with at least one long scratch, that she withdrew at last from the hole, but now there was no time or thought to spare for minor injuries. Hastily collecting their things, they flung open the door in triumph and ran out into the free air.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE STRANGE COMPANION

It was all intoxicating; the fresh scent of it the very breath of freedom after the stale smell of must and old lamps; the grey-green heights, the long black lines of wall, the swirl of mist, a paradisial glimpse after that shuttered and be-lumbered place. Fleet-footed and alight with triumphant laughter, they sped like hares across the first glittering field. "Like escaping from a dust-bin," Peter cried. At the far wall, a common impulse made them halt and look back at the shattered chrysalis they left behind. A flutter of crimson at the gate below showed them the old woman. They waved derisively, and saw her return to the house. "I'd give anything to see the Canon's face when he comes back," Adam grinned. Peter hurried forward into the next field. "I don't want to see his face again," she remarked as he caught up to her. "And I shan't be happy until I'm well out of sight and sound of him." This new release had banished all feeling of weariness, all memory of sodden clothes and cramped limbs; and they went striding up the track that had brought them down into the valley an hour before, striding confidently now where before they had been slipping and scrambling, as if the day had just begun.

It was, however, easier now than it had been, though the ground was still soaked. The rain had almost stopped; there was an occasional faint glimpse of the afternoon sun, and one green fold of the hill far away stood out in full sunlight; the white reek along the tops was rapidly thinning to a pale blue haze; and a solitary lark somewhere rose and sang through the brightening air. To all this Peter lifted her clear-cut face and wide eyes, and waved a benedictory hand. "Isn't it glorious!" she cried, shining over him and over all their world in turn. "And it's going to be fine, finer and finer."

He had thought so too, but now he surveyed the whole sky. "I'm not so sure." He nodded towards the west. "Look at that.

I don't like the look of that." The whole westerly sky was darkly smouldering, and hill and cloud were hugely merged into one thunderous mass. "If that lot comes down on us," he went on, "we shall know about it." She was like a child going to a picnic. She waved again, this time in gay defiance, and cried: "You're nearly as heavy as it looks, Master Adam. You're rapidly becoming solemn and apprehensive and parental. You'll be telling me soon that there's another day to-morrow, or that I shall be crying before bedtime. We shan't have another downpour. And if we have, it doesn't matter."

Then she suddenly held out the hand she had been waving, the hand that had gone groping for the key, glanced at it and was not able to withdraw it before he too had noticed the trickle of blood. "Hello! What's that?" he cried, "is that the scratch?" In reply, she nodded and remarked that it was nothing; there was no necessity for him to look at it. The exasperating creature showed him nothing but a raised and set little chin, and went striding on. "It's my turn to complain now," he said, with a friendly warmth and frankness that more than cancelled out his display of irritation. "I may be heavy and parental and all that you say I am, but aren't you overdoing this stoic Amazon business?" She flushed at this. "And is there any real point," he pursued, "in refusing to show me that scratch and, if necessary, to have the blood wiped off?" It was characteristic of her that she should now eye him steadily, the merest touch of rose in her cheeks to mark the passing confusion, and then without a word slip up the sleeves of her waterproof and tweed coat underneath and hold out for his inspection the arm that had lately set them free.

Adam grasped her hand lightly, aware of the delicate cool touch of the finger-tips, but not for once deliberately so, and looked down at the extended arm. There was a dark bruise or two on its round white surface, and some red marks where it had been pressed against the splintered edge of the hole in the door. Blood was slowly oozing from the long scratch, and there was a crimson stain down one side where her sleeve had been rubbing. One of the hill's innumerable streams was foaming down a few yards away from them, and to this he hastened, returning a minute later with a dripping handkerchief. Without words, quiet-eyed, cool, serious, yet with a vague warmth flowing between them, en-

compassing them, together they bathed the arm and bound it up where the scratch was deepest. When they had done, Adam felt queerly troubled, as if by some disturbing sweetness in the air. There had been a moment during the time she had rested her hand in his and he had seen the stain vanish from the soft white flesh, when he had been assailed by an impulse to bend down and press his lips against her arm, not in haste and passion, but slowly, calmly, with a curious cool tenderness that he felt was now taking possession of him. The impulse had come and gone, but he had wondered about it, for it was quite different, for example, from those impulses of yesterday in the orchard, and the whole feeling that would in some way have been expressed and communicated by the action was itself different from anything he remembered. He was still troubled by it all, still haunted by that vague sweetness in the very air, when they made ready to move again. He felt that he did not know how to act towards her, did not even know what to say.

But a great gust of wind, dark and dripping from the west, swooped down on them to aid him in retrieving the situation. It gave him an opportunity of being equally bluff and boisterous. "We're in for it again," he roared. "Have some chocolate?" She accepted half the broken packet with a murmured word of thanks, and munched and trudged away without speaking. But though she was quiet, she was not unfriendly nor even detached; her silence was filled with an easy understanding, lit with companionship; he had now passed the point with her where it was necessary to exchange words; or so it seemed to him. He told himself that she was not of those who put their trust in such exchanges and believe that nothing vital is accomplished in love and friendship without words, but rather one of those who distrust the whole verbal jugglery and look forward to the moment when such communication becomes merely play, shifting foam on the deep ocean of human relationship. Perhaps already she felt, as he himself believed he partly felt, that their two bodies swinging forward side by side, breasting the hill together, were busy consolidating their friendship, were deep in their own talk. Why, then, barter the dangerous symbols of the dictionary?

They were now two-thirds of the way up the hillside; the sky was darkening over them; and already the western heights were

lost in the slanting rain. The head of the valley behind them was a vague noise of water, through which there came, like a sudden rent in the short curtain of sound, a distant baa from huddled sheep or the occasional scream of the great moorland birds. The wind had gone howling away, and now once more there had fallen that sinister quiet which heralded the approach not of sweet lisping summer rain but of a black downpour, the blind anger of the over-burdened sky. "Look at it," he cried. She looked and nodded, pursing up her lips a little. "There's nothing to be done about it," she remarked, finally. "We can't stop here."

Fifty yards or so to the right was one of those crazy stone walls that may be seen crawling and twisting through the most desolate places in the Pennine Hills, that appear to serve no useful purpose, do not seem to be the handiwork of men, but the creation of the hills themselves, being there—and remaining there without ever being diminished or augmented by a single piece of stone—only to add the last touch to the strange landscape, to bind its green folds and high places, its cloaks of close green turf, its crown of bracken and ling, with the dark rims and iron braid of rock. This wall was nearly a man's height and ran straight up the hill almost to the summit. "If the rain comes slanting from the west, as I think it will," he said, "our best plan is to make for the wall there, and climb under cover over that. It won't give us much shelter, but it's better than nothing, and as it runs straight to the top, we shan't be encouraged to lose our way."

She agreed, and had no sooner turned to lead the way across than they felt the first chill swish of rain. There were tracts of green slime and oozy peat between them and the wall, and it looked to Adam as if Peter, now some yards ahead, would be bogged. But a few graceful leaps landed her on less treacherous ground, on which, however, she now seemed to limp a little. Watching her as he followed on behind, Adam found himself visited again by that feeling that he had struggled with before. Now it was stronger than ever. Something impelled him, perhaps it was the mere sight of her there, a creature so eager and delicate on that massive hill, to hurry forward and join her, and once there, neighbouring this one bright fellow-spirit in all that old and savage world of rock and cloud, to cry foolishly, incoherently from the heart, "Splendid, splendid, Peter! Let's hurry on!" and to stretch

out a hand and grip her bent elbow, almost lifting her forward.

She flung out her arm and flashed round upon him. "Oh, you are stupid! Don't you see you're spoiling everything!" She sent all the day's shared adventures whirling away; strange eyes looked at one another through the rain. Adam was dismayed, hurt, angry all at once, but the torrent was now lashing down upon them, his face was streaming so that he could hardly glare back at her, and it was necessity rather than a mere desire to escape from the situation that made him cry to her, after a vague shout of apology, not to stop but to move on under cover of the wall. Both bending slightly to escape the full fury of the slanting downpour, slipping, scrambling, soaked and aching, they moved on, Peter first and Adam a pace or two behind. In this monstrous situation, gasping and wincing and shouting through the storm, they made an endeavour to come to terms. Never could Adam remember a talk conducted so crazily, yet it seemed so necessary to have it out then and there that he could not move on in silence, and neither, it appeared, could she.

"Why did I spoil everything? I don't understand you," he roared. He had wished to be cold, a trifle supercilious, but found it difficult when he had to shout to be heard at all.

"You must see what I mean," she shrieked in reply, "I thought you were different. Everything was right between us. And then you go and . . ." But if there was anything more, it was lost in the wind and rain.

"I go and what?" he shouted back. "Aren't you making a fuss about nothing?" He might have said more, so indignant did he feel, but at that moment he nearly went sprawling. His right boot seemed to be rapidly filling with water; he could feel it between his toes every time his foot went down.

" . . . Not what you did, but the attitude of mind at the back of it," came the tiny shriek. "Don't you see it must be one of two things, and they're both equally objectionable . . . beastly . . . any decent girl. Either it's patronage or mauling . . ."

"Or what?" he bellowed. Lord, this was absurd! But he must get at it.

"Or mauling, *mauling*—touching, stroking, grasping, wanting a nice soft plaything. Well, either it was that or it was patronage—chivalry—the weaker, gentle sex rubbish! Don't you see! I won't

be patronized. You wouldn't have done it to another man. And I won't be mauled." There had fallen a sudden little lull, through which the last three sentences had come down to him in gigantic capitals.

He wanted to laugh and protest and argue all at one and the same time; but she was off again, this time more quietly, before he was able to do anything but gasp in the background. "You could be so absolutely right, and that's the irritating part of it. You've been splendid most of the day, better than I thought any man could be, almost, and it's all been gorgeous fun and I've adored it. And then you deliberately begin to spoil it. Patronage or mauling, or a mixture of both. Yes, that's what it was, a mixture of both, for you're both a patronizing sentimentalist and a mauler, like those old men who undress you with their little piggy eyes every time they look at you . . ."

He was horrified and furious: "Rubbish! You know very well I'm nothing of the kind." He had a horrible vision of those old men, for even he remembered noticing their eyes.

A laugh floated back to him. "Well, I don't say you're as bad as they are," she went on, "but take care you don't grow up into one. I don't even say you're a very bad specimen, as young men go, and you might be really decent if you tried hard. But just now you're too full of sex."

"I'm not full of sex," he roared indignantly. He loathed the idea of being full of sex, and hated the jargon that turned sex into something you could be full of, just as if it were beer or microbes. "I'm not full of anything just now but rain-water," he added, with a rather sulky growl.

"Absolutely full," she went on, calmly. "It peeps out of your eyes. You can't hide it. I noticed it the very first time I saw you." And with that, her feet slipped suddenly from under her and she came sprawling back and would have sent the two of them flying if he had not contrived to grasp the wall with one hand and steady her with the hand that held his stick.

As they righted themselves, half a dozen retorts to all her accusations flashed through his mind, but he dismissed them as cheap and unworthy and contented himself with asking: "When was this very first time you saw me? I had no idea you were so observant." Once more he was addressing her soaking hat and

streaming waterproof, for they had moved forward again.

"It doesn't matter when it was I first saw you—or noticed you. You're very disappointing and I'm still furious." And then the strange creature halted, turned round and smiled at him. Evidently she had talked out her temper and wanted now to buy him off with a grin. And then she could talk of being treated as if she were another man! But he was not to be so cheaply appeased. Unfortunately, however, before he had done more than consider the possibility of an averted face, a cold glance, a raising of the eyebrows, he found himself grinning in return, grinning idiotically through the downpour. It was odd, though, how attractive the face of a girl, a real girl and not a daub of red and white, could be in the wet, so freshly rosy of cheek and lip, eyes clearly washed, raindrops in her hair. And how angry she would be if she knew what he was thinking! Was this peeping out of his eyes, too? "March on, girl," he gruffly commanded; and she went on again, none too quickly now, leaving him to scramble after her, half-drowned but still pondering.

This time there were no mists sweeping over the summit, for instead of comfortably settling upon the heights the clouds seemed to have burst upon them. There had been rain most of the way up, but now they plunged into one great flickering sheet of water, hissing down on the broadening pools and into a thousand streams that scored their way through the loose brown turf and rushed below in beer-coloured torrents. Nothing was to be seen except this grey desolate little plateau, a few acres of wet, jagged rock and swimming soil in a world of falling water; yet this little was usually more than they were able to see, so blinding was the downpour; and now, side by side, huddling in their heavy drenched coats, they reeled rather than walked across the summit. Setting their teeth, all intent now upon mere movement, they exchanged neither a word nor even a glance. Before they had reached the beginning of the long descent into Runnerdale, Adam had sunk several times in bog and holes over the top of his boots, and it looked as if Peter had, too. Now she was gasping a little. On the very edge of the descent, she suddenly swayed to the right, and he saw that her right foot had disappeared and that she was tugging away desperately. He crossed to her, and she leaned on his shoulder while she gave a gigantic tug. All that appeared was a

little stockinged foot, very wet and stained; the shoe remained embedded in the slime. He retrieved it for her and then helped her to put it on. She thanked him with a pale smile, and moved on again, more slowly now and obviously with an effort.

"I feel," cried Adam, between blowing and gasping, "I feel like a man—who's just been killed twice over—drowned and stoned." He shook himself like a dog out of water. Peter merely nodded and then tightened her lips. Twice she tottered against him, and once her stick, on which she was leaning heavily down the treacherous slope, went sliding out of her hand, and by an immense effort he had darted across to forestall her and pick it up himself. He had noticed her swaying, and if she had stooped she might have fallen. He himself only moved now with an effort, and felt his bones, the only dry things left to him, creaking as he harried them on. The descent was rapidly becoming one long wet agony, a matter of clenched fists and teeth, even to him, and he could only shudderingly guess what it had become to her, in whom all was numbed and unwilling and crying for mercy, except the indomitable little blaze of spirit that kept her by his side. There came to his mind what she had said about this country during the morning, and he fumbled with the thought that it had suddenly challenged her and that this was her reply; but he never got it clear, this thought, which became only a slow and very broken procession of detached words and vague images passing somewhere behind the wind and the rain and the shining slope, behind damp skin and aching muscles and eyes peering through the water. And now those eyes discovered something not very far below; it was one of those stone shelters used by the shepherds. Had Peter seen it, too? He turned and saw that she had; her eyes still rested on it. "Let's go in there," he gasped to her. "I don't know—about you—but I'm absolutely fagged." It seemed ages since he had last heard her voice. It now came to him in a tiny whisper "Yes, let's. I'm done, too." A few minutes later they staggered in through the wide open doorway and flung themselves down on the stone bench there, letting the arms that now held up their weary heads rest on the table of stone.

After that long buffetting on the windy, rainy hill, there was something unreal in this little sheltered space, this sudden quietness; and everything that happened there was like a dream, one of

those slow and very quiet dreams that are strangely memorable and as haunting as a tune. The things of the surface, movements, speech, the records of the senses, were all ghostly, so many dim scrawls on the page of life; but something far within, at the very glowing core, lived intensely, casting a light over that page, holding it, staring at it, fixedly. Nothing that happened was surprising; all was quietly inevitable; if wonder was there, it did not point to this or that, but sustained the whole scene, created the atmosphere in which it moved; and it was only afterwards, when he went back in his memory to explore the situation, to revisit, with a queer little ache, this shelter and its lost dream, that Adam began to feel surprise.

After resting a minute or two, he had struggled to his feet, removed his raincoat, now a sodden mass, and after shaking it had spread it out over the table to dry. A handkerchief rubbed vigorously over his head and face had completed the ineffectual drying process. He was soaked to the skin from head to foot, but it was warmer in here and already he felt better. Meanwhile, Peter had not made a movement. Without a word, he now stood over her and lightly touched her hat and coat. After a moment, she slowly took off her hat, and he helped her out of her coat, which he quietly shook and then spread out near his own. Still silent, they sat down side by side on the bench, leaning back against the edge of the table behind. There was no sound but the hollow pattering of the rain above and a vague noise of running water outside. They were sitting at the bottom of the ocean, two ghosts of the drowned, while far above, the wild seas churned and doomed ships lit their flares. Mechanically, Adam filled his pipe, and then, still dazed, he held it in his hand unlit while huge dim fancies lumbered through his mind. Staring down, he caught sight of Peter's left shoe, suddenly looked at it as if it were something from another planet. It was a little shoe but very strong, one of those brown brogue things with fantastic projecting tongues, now all soaked and stained with mud and water. How ridiculously small it was, and yet how capable, alert, half impudent and yet infinitely gallant! The thought of this little thing trotting by his side all day, always keeping pace, grappling with streaming rock and plunging through the slime, this absurd shoe, set his heart stirring queerly. He felt a sudden rush of tenderness.

He had not said a word, and had not made a sound or movement, but now, just as if there had been some magic sign between them, Peter slowly drooped and swayed towards him, finally resting her head against his sleeve. And then a small damp hand came groping and found its way at last into his. There it remained for some time, until at length he gently brought back his arm and put it round her shoulders so that she would not slip. She nestled more closely to him, her face pressed now against the lapel of his coat. Only an occasional quiver of her eyelashes showed that she was not asleep. And then, very softly, he began celebrating their day's exploits, and almost as if to himself, paid tribute to her companionship. Nothing had been possible without her: she had been wonderful. But there came a murmur from below, and he had a brief glimpse of upturned eyes. No, she had not been wonderful, and—and—she was sorry. His heart swelling, he assured her that he could not imagine what she could be sorry about, whispered her name and his astonished admiration in one long trembling breath. He tightened his clasp so that now he could feel the smooth, yielding shoulder under the rough tweed, and she quivered, released a faint sigh, and then once more pressed her face against him; nor did they speak another word, but sat there, silent, close, while time went ebbing away from them.

Neither of them could have said how long it was before a pale gleam of sunlight came through the doorway to remind them of the world outside, a world now rising from the waters. It lifted the spell from them, and together, with that bustle under cover of which so many shy emotions are locked away, they stamped about, struggled into their stiff coats, and limped out into the open. Loudly they compared watches and various notes on wet clothes, tired limbs, and gnawings of hunger. It was past the dinner-hour. They had visions, they said, of hot baths, dry things and the supper of heroes. They wondered what the day had brought the great conspiracy, whose very existence had passed out of mind, Adam confessed, these last few hours, to which confession Peter had no reply but an enigmatic glance. They recalled Hake and the Canon to one another, and in the face of these shrinking images, were two very droll and triumphant. The pursuit, the trap, the escape, all the day's official adventures were passed under review to the quick-step of bright chatter. And all the while, somewhere

behind this scene of noisy fellowship, stealthy hands were folding away mysterious fabrics of experience and secret cupboard doors were clicking. When this was all done, the last door shut, there fell between them a long silence.

They had limped stiffly down nearly to the bottom of the hill, and had already chosen a field-path that would enable them to avoid the village and make straight for the Hall; and now the day, instead of roaring them home in their own wind and rain, had banished the tumult and, with a serene irony, had recalled its lost midsummer and settled into a quiet green dream, the peace that comes between summer sunset and twilight. The hills were sinking to blue distance and beyond their wavering line were flushed little clouds like dim roses in the sky. Somewhere a late lark soared, and all the sweet-smelling fields they passed, and all the darkening thickets, were happy with calling birds. Once, as he surveyed the faintly-mottled silvery expanse above the hills, where a little patch of washed blue was showing, Adam caught a glimpse of the moon, a white, brittle mask. "This seems another world," he remarked softly, and then, looking down at himself, added ruefully: "And hardly the world for us." She, too, had been drinking it all in, turning grave young eyes this way and that, and after a moment, when all that he saw was a pale, clear-cut profile, she said, gently and seriously: "I know. That's what I've been thinking. Perhaps you didn't mean all that I was thinking, though your words often do mean more than they pretend to; all our words do, I think, at least at certain times. But I'm not afraid of it —down here, I mean. Look at that. Isn't it glorious?" And she pointed.

He looked up and saw a tiny spur of the hill crowned with pine and fir, a little exquisite group of young trees, strong, delicately graved, all perfectly silhouetted against a sky of palest lavender. There was something in him escaped and went winging up at the sight, and he was so moved that before he had time to think what he was doing, he had stammered: "Why!—you know—it reminds me of you—it's just like you." And then he wondered why he had made such an idiotic remark, which even in her strangely quiet mood of the moment she would not let go unpunished. Hastily looking away, he waited for the storm to break. But she had turned to him, flushed, catching her breath a little: "Do you really

mean that?" He saw her aglow, and nodded soberly. "Thank you," she cried; and then, after the tiniest laugh at herself, she went on: "That's the best thing that was ever said to me, or ever said to anyone." They could have said a thousand things to one another after that, but they were very tired, and somehow it was better to say nothing, to trudge on in a deep, friendly silence towards the place where the rooks were cawing in the trees and there slowly ascended that blue smoke which spells in the evening air the end of so many great days.

"I've no doubt at all," said Mrs. Belville, who met them on the very doorstep, "that you've had the most incredible adventures. But I'm not going to listen to a single word about them. If you could see yourselves, the pair of you! Your next adventure will consist of hot baths, beds and food, all of which have been waiting for you for some time. Off you go!" And she harried them up the stairs, where they parted in search of bathrooms and bedrooms, parted for the night, perhaps for ever.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM

HELEN was the first person he met that morning. He was descending the stairs on his way to breakfast when he saw her. The hall below was a pool of misty sunlight, and there in the middle of it, flecked with dim gold, was a figure in a cream and cherry-coloured frock. A lovely dark head was raised at his approach, and as he saw her face light up with recognition, her eyes kindling with delicate mischief, he caught his breath.

"Good morning, Mr. Stewart," she said. "I had begun to think you were a fabulous monster—no, not that, but a legendary hero—and that everybody here was busy inventing your exploits." Her voice went rippling down in mock apology. "You were becoming less real than your old namesake—if that's allowed."

"Wh-which namesake?" He was stammering a little. Helen made him feel bold enough inside, a towering fellow, but very shy outside, in speech, glance, gesture. "Christian or surname? The one in the garden or the one over the water?"

"Oh, the Eden one, of course," she replied, still with a mock apology.

"I think I am less real," he confessed. "And I had been feeling much the same about you. Only I had come to the conclusion that you and your namesake were one and the same, and that you really had gone to Egypt." He was gathering courage.

"To Egypt?" She opened wide eyes and wrinkled her brow, and did it all so deliciously that he wanted to keep her there for ever.

"Yes, don't you remember. Some say she went there before Troy, and left a wraith behind. Others say she went there after Troy."

"Oh!" There was a mocking little suggestion of a gasp. Then she held up a finger. "I'm sure that's not allowed, even if I did begin it. But I have a message from Peter, who sends you her

love—no, not that, I'm sure, but whatever it is that Peter does send people. The poor darling's suddenly developed a cold in the head, after your tremendous yesterday, and now she has to stay in bed all day. She was furious at first, but she's resigned now and has just begun reading *Huckleberry Finn* for about the fiftieth time. I asked her why, and she said she always reads *Huckleberry Finn* when she has a cold. Isn't she an odd, delightful girl?"

Adam agreed that she was. He also said that he was sorry about the cold, feeling sure that he really was sorry, though it seemed rather absurd of Peter to be so fond of colds. He saw her, watery-eyed, red-nosed, sniffing, and then, hastily dismissing the image, smiled at Helen, with whom it was obviously impossible to associate colds in the head.

"It's particularly wretched her missing to-day," Helen went on, "because she'd have adored it."

"Is there anything special about to-day?" Adam asked, though already he felt in his bones that there was.

"Of course!" she cried, pretending great excitement. "This is going to be *the* day. It's begun already. There's historic occasion written all over it. Haven't you heard the news? You shouldn't stay in bed so late. The clans are arriving, at least there are lairds all over the place, rolling up in gigantic cars."

"I don't see any," said Adam, looking about him as if the lairds were a kind of moth.

Helen waved a hand towards the breakfast-room. "There are several in there," she remarked. "They're all plutocrats, you know, not mere Highland gentry; cotton, soap, rubber, and so on; and being introduced to them is just like reading an advertisement hoarding. They're all household words. One of them has already offered me a part in musical comedy, at the 'Frivolity,' I think. It was Lord Lochferry, who owns it, and who's really a Lancashire cotton-spinner, you know. I hadn't known the man two minutes, and during those two minutes hadn't shown the slightest desire to go on the stage. But nothing would stop him, and he called me 'my dear.' "

"Of all the confounded cheek!" Adam began, sure that he hated the fellow.

"That's what I thought," she went on. "But it's getting madder and madder. And to-night there's to be a grand dinner and

historic meeting afterwards, when a certain personage—that's the phrase, isn't it?—is expected to be present. Yes, he's really coming to-night, or so the Baron says this morning. And if he doesn't, the Baron will have to invent him, after all this fuss."

Everything seemed to become mad and merry under her eyes. The world seemed to dance round her. Adam was loth to let her go, and, suddenly shy again, stammered: "What are you—are you going chasing off somewhere to-day?"

"I'm going this minute to help Lady Baddeley-Fragge in the garden. And there she is." She darted away, but called over her shoulder as she went: "Come and help us after you've had breakfast if there are no more heroics for you." Then she was gone. Adam stood still a moment staring after her. There seemed a curious drowning sweetness in the air. It was absurd, but he was beginning to choke a little and tremble, just as he had done years ago when he had wakened on Christmas morning and seen dimly through the gloom of the shuttered nursery, the packages heaped about his bed. Perhaps it was because the world now seemed like those packages, hugely bulging with promise.

Breakfast was an odd, noisy affair, in which grotesque figures moved illusively in the morning sunshine. The plutocratic lairds were there, some half-dozen of them. One or two were just so much parchment and pointed little eyes, but the rest were big men with enormous heads and jutting chins, jovial brigands of industry, buccaneers born two hundred years too late, fellows who were obviously never happy unless they were planning raids upon property and pretty women. With the exception of the Baron, the other men of the party who were present were completely dominated by these massive intruders; but the Baron moved among them as an equal, if not a superior, and managed the biggest bull-necked Cæsar of them all as deftly as he managed Sir Arthur or Templake. Breakfast was over for most of them, and they were now lighting gigantic cigars and either leaning back heavily in their chairs or wandering to the window. The Baron, after giving Adam a glance of mingled triumph and mischief, a word or two, and an introduction here and there, had collected two of the largest magnates, who could not claim equality with him on the score of either bulk of body or length of cigar, and had shepherded them out as if they were prize rams. Another of them, known as the

Laird of Strathsglen, but resembling an ancient Assyrian monarch newly barbered and tailored was at the other end of the room talking in a curiously penetrating and lisping voice to a very bewildered Sir Arthur, who apparently found himself confronted with a plan to put the conspiracy on the basis of a limited liability company. Every now and then the voice of this laird from the desert, telling its tale of "debenturth" and "athethmenth," came cutting through every sound in the room.

Templake crossed over just as Adam was finishing his breakfast. In this company he looked subdued and more than ever the unsuccessful water-colourist, though Adam never knew to the very last whether he had ever taken up a brush in his life. Apparently he had heard something about yesterday's adventures, probably from Peter, and now he wanted the whole story, being particularly curious about the meeting with their old acquaintance, the Canon. While Adam was satisfying this curiosity with a rather flippant account of the lamp-room episode, he was also going back in remembrance to that railway-carriage in which he had first met the Canon and this very Templake who now almost gaped at him. He felt rather contemptuous but at the same time pitiful towards that ignorant, wondering self in the railway-carriage, yet he could not help noticing that the events in which that self had taken part were beginning to assume a character very different from the happenings of the moment; already those adventures of the train were touched with that far-away wonder, already they were wearing an homeric look. Strange, how quickly life moved forward, how things had changed behind you each time you turned your head! In a day or two, perhaps, this very talk he was having now with Templake would have taken on that appearance and quality, would be something shining from a lost world. Everything he might say and do during these next few hours, all the day's events, would glide softly away, apparently merging into the passing commonplace, and then after a lapse of time, it might be a week, a month, a year, they would suddenly compose and erect themselves into an antique heroic group, white marble or enduring bronze, gleaming back there above the long fading avenues and dim lawns of memory. Everything, he told himself, was just beginning, but now he had a sudden premonition that everything was soon to end too, that these very moments now shredding

away were those above all others that he would return to in wonder once they had grouped themselves, radiant in lost sunshine, in his remembrance. But all the while he was telling his tale of yesterday.

"Just what you might expect of the fellow," said Templake, as they strolled out of the room together. "I've heard of him, of course, but didn't recognize him in the train. You heard our talk there?"

"Some of it," Adam replied.

"After a few minutes' talk, I saw what type of man I had to deal with, a bigoted obscurantist, a narrow pessimist, a denier of beauty and truth, with an absolutely closed mind and heart. You saw how I handled him?"

"I did," said Adam, heartily, thankful that the question had taken such a form.

"My dear Geoffrey, I'm sorry to intrude, particularly at such a moment"—it was Mrs. Belville who had joined them—"but I must point out, as a sister and, I trust, a lifelong friend, that never once have you handled anybody. All your life you've been handled."

"Nonsense, Muriel!" But he had clearly had some forty years of this, and had long ago admitted defeat. "You don't know what we're talking about."

"Not that I think you're any the worse for that, because there's too much of this handling about," she went on calmly, looking from one to the other in her usual cool masterful fashion. "And talking about handling, what on earth are we to do with your latest recruits, these industrial magnates and Oriental moneylenders that have suddenly taken to masquerading as Scots gentlemen and Jacobites from the Highlands? Who induced these gallant gentlemen to join the romantic lost cause?"

Templake looked dubious and there was gloom in his voice. "I didn't, and I'm not sure it's a good thing their being here."

"And I'm positive it isn't," his sister remarked. "My dear, most of them are dreadful. The very sight of them has decided me to take at least half a dozen well-known household commodities out of my shopping lists for ever."

"I don't understand," Adam put in. "Have they actually joined up?"

"Well, no, not exactly," Templake replied, slowly and in his best historical manner. "They're pledged to secrecy, of course, and are all interested, and so are here to talk things over and to meet the heir when he comes to-night. I don't care much for them myself, but I can see that they might be very useful, and it's high time we looked at the practical side of things. They all have enormous estates in Scotland, where many of their tenants are probably genuine old Jacobites; and they're all very wealthy and influential, and being afraid of the coming republic and a possible social revolution, they might be ready to throw in their lot with us. Meanwhile they're considering it."

"Which means, I take it," said Mrs. Belville, "they're estimating the possible loot and weighing the bribes. When Lady Matchways comes down and sees them, she'll be sending out for dynamite. Unless the Baron can persuade them to wear his stock of false beards—and he's quite capable of it—when they attend the grand conspiratorial meeting to-night, I refuse to be interested. I see this affair ending in either half a dozen bogus companies or two or three new musical comedies, for these gentlemen apparently deal in both. Meanwhile, I look like having a frantic day, for I've promised to help Lady Baddeley-Fragge with the arrangements for to-night, which means that I shall probably have to do it all. As usual, she's begun already, poor dear, by gathering flowers, and that will probably take her all day."

"That reminds me," said Adam, as casually as he could with Mrs. Belville's eye upon him, "I think I promised to help Lady Baddeley-Fragge in the garden this morning."

"Did you, indeed!" She raised her eyebrows at him. "Well, I think I can find you something more important to do than that. I shall probably need both of you soon. Besides, I believe Helen's helping her in the garden. Ah!" She broke off to regard him quizzically, and then addressed the two of them again. "I must say that the man Siddell looks like being a treasure. Already he's taken half the load off our shoulders, and is going down to Lobley or somewhere with a gigantic number of commissions, food, wine, and what not, and is bringing some extra waiters back with them. Apparently he knows where they, and everything else, too, are to be found, and he never turns a hair whatever you suggest to him. I don't know what kind of a conspirator he makes, but he's

certainly a cool and efficient hand at a rushed house-party. If he weren't taking part in this conspiracy for money, I should begin to suspect him. He's much too sensible."

Adam was staring past her down the hall. Helen had just entered from the garden, her arms heaped with white lilac. The sunlight came streaming in with her. The drifting fragrance of the blossom heralded her approach.

Mrs. Belville turned, and her face softened a moment. Then she shook a finger at her niece, crying: "Helen, come here! What have you been doing to this young man? I suddenly saw his face light up, and I thought at first it was my talk of wine and extra waiters, knowing his sex as I do, but then I saw that it was you. That, I think, is preferable, and of course, my dear, you make a very charming picture, a thing you can always be trusted to make; but nevertheless it won't do."

Confused as he was by this speech, Adam was still looking at Helen, and now she raised her eyes to his for one sweet drowning moment. Then, without any sign of embarrassment, she looked at her aunt and calmly observed: "Mr. Stewart and I have only exchanged half a dozen remarks. You mustn't tease him, my dear." She held out her armful of white blossom to them. "Double white lilac. Isn't it miraculous? It's probably the last there'll be anywhere in the country this year. Perhaps there never will be any more." Her voice was dying away and Adam's heart was perishing with it. "Who knows?"

"I know," said her aunt, briskly. "There'll be just as much next year. And I also know that you got that remark from Lady Baddeley-Fragge, whose botanical-apocalyptic strain I could recognize anywhere. Still"—and she bent down to the blossom—"it is lovely. And so are you, my child. The only difference between you is that you are persistently and grossly aware of the fact, and the lilac isn't. And now I must fly." And she sent them all flying in different directions.

Adam went out into the garden, where Helen would return after she had gone through the house, like Spring, leaving white blossom and the scent of lilac in every room. There he found Mr. Hooby standing on the lawn, his hands behind his back, flashing his round spectacles at the front of the house, where innumerable birds were wheeling and darting. "I reckon I'm to be a very busy

man to-day, Mr. Stewart," said Mr. Hooby, very solemnly, "but I just couldn't go inside and talk business before I'd watched those birds for a spell. Lady Baddeley-Fragge tells me that's what you call a pied-wagtail, and it certainly is a beautiful bird. It has all your swallows and martins well beaten."

There were about a dozen of these wagtails skimming through the most intricate evolutions and almost glittering in their rapid alternation of deep black and dazzling white. They were not common birds, but neither were they very rare, and Adam remembered having seen them before, but now as he stared, his eye held by their flashing beauty and abandon, they seemed unearthly visitants, and the sight of them lit the morning, this house and all the people in it, with a gleam of faery. He looked from them to the round, rapt face of Mr. Hooby beside him, and there came to him the thought of Helen with her white trail of blossom, and vaguer thoughts of Lady Baddeley-Fragge somewhere behind them waist-deep among her roses, of the Baron and his fat flock of millionaires, of Peter and her *Huckleberry Finn*, of all the others there, and he lost himself in wonderment. He stared in a dream at Mr. Hooby, and Mr. Hooby stared in a dream at the wagtails.

Suddenly he felt tremendously zestful and happy, and smiled at Mr. Hooby as if that gentleman were the oldest and best of his friends, as indeed at that moment he somehow seemed to be. Out of the fullness of his heart, Adam asked his companion about the new arrivals, of whom he felt sure Mr. Hooby would approve. To his surprise, however, Mr. Hooby had a very small opinion of these fantastic lairds. "No, sir," he told Adam, "we can do that kind of man better in America. I like your gentlemen, such as our host here, who's a wonderful type; but I'll say these other fellows don't come to much with me. They're not big enough and simple enough. I don't say they won't be mighty useful in the movement if they come in—I stand by my old friend, Baron Roland there—for they've certainly got money and some pull, and they're all wearing these good old names and running big estates up north, where there's any amount of the fine old Jacobite spirit about, they tell me. And that's what gets me—old traditions and loyalties and real downright chivalry, the spirit of roam-ance. But if you want these other fellows, just the big, simple, primitive money-getters

and pushers, then we've got men on our side—and some of them are friends of mine—you couldn't beat." And he beamed at Adam and was so obviously filled with an essential kindness, and yet so curiously unreal as a person, that Adam could almost have laughed and cried at the very sight of him standing there.

All he did, however, was to make a confession. "The whole thing, you know, isn't real to me yet. In fact, this morning it seems more fantastic than ever, and sometimes I feel as if I were dreaming or had walked into some daft historical tale."

Mr. Hooby considered this statement very gravely. "Well," he said, slowly, "that's a very interesting reaction of yours, Mr. Stewart." And for a moment he looked as if he were about to give Adam so many marks or even a small prize for it. "It's certainly never taken me that way, but then I've been what you might call a fairly active member of this movement for some time now, and so it seems to me one of the livest things going. I'll say now there are one or two big men over there I know, old man Slosson, Jim Tabb, and one or two more, who, if they got right on to this, would have us all inside Westminster Abbey with our coronation clothes on within the year. But it would just have to be their own proposition, and I don't see the roam-ance holding out long once they sat in the chair. I'm thinking though, that these fellows of yours, with their new dressed-up titles, will be just big enough to spoil it, putting it over fine old aristocrats like Sir Arthur Baddeley-Fragge, but not big enough to run it through on their own."

"But surely they can't spoil it—and I suppose you mean change the atmosphere of the movement—while the Baron's more or less in command?" Adam had no sooner asked this question that he saw Helen coming round the corner of the house.

"Well, the Baron's a real big man, and if he doesn't know what roam-ance is, then I can't tell you where you're going to learn." There was more of this from Mr. Hooby, but now Adam was entirely engrossed by a little comedy that was taking place on the lawn. One of the fattest of the magnates was puffing after Helen in a vain attempt to overtake her. She did not appear to be moving very quickly, or to be aware that anyone was behind her, but after watching her for a few moments, Adam was convinced that she knew as much as he did. She sailed across the lawn, walked round several flower-beds, then turned away and fluttered in and out of

the bushes, without any sign of haste, and contriving her movements so that the panting and purple-faced gentleman was just kept lumbering hopefully in pursuit. Finally he had to stop, and the cream and cherry-coloured dress disappeared behind a bright tangle of leaves. It had all been done so dexterously that Adam could have shouted his approval. It had, too, seemed oddly significant, perhaps because the two personages in it were so distinctly opposed, their action so clear-cut, their figures so neatly picked out against the uniform background of lawn and leaf, that the little incident had the air of being a dramatized fable.

"If you ask me," said Mr. Hooby, reflectively, "I should say that our friend Lord Lochferry started to catch up with that girl at least twenty-five years too late."

"Is that Lochferry?" And Adam stared across at the man, who was still puffing and blowing, but who pretended now to be dividing his interest between his cigar-case and the neighbouring flower-beds. There was still something unreal about him, as if his figure had dropped out of a series of pictures illustrating some old-fashioned allegory.

"It is. He's in cotton. I've met him before. Most times he manages to catch up with the girls, but I should say that Mrs. Maythorn's too light in the foot and clear in the head for him. It's time I was moving." He looked at his watch. "I shall have to hustle round. If I stand here much longer, I shall forget that this is our big day. We're expecting noos of that young man this morning, and the Baron may have heard something now. See you later, Mr. Stewart."

Mr. Hooby thereupon carried away his round face and round spectacles to dwell upon other phenomena, and left Adam alone with his midsummer of bright lawns and flashing birds. He lit a pipe and idly moved over the grass, lounging before the burnished screen of the morning but gradually losing himself in a reverie in which the whole situation, the mounting adventure and fantastic comedy of the cause and all the personages in it, sparkled and sang like the day itself. Occasional thoughts of Helen flashed through this reverie like the pied-wagtails that his eyes still tried to follow. He felt that the day had a pulse, throbbing behind the embroideries of sunlit petal and leaf and fluttering birds, and that this pulse was gathering speed. Anything and everything might happen now;

events not thought of and therefore never deflowered by anticipation might suddenly blossom riotously; for here at last was a day that could outstrip those headlong and predatory dreams of his.

Then something came crashing through this monstrously heightened mood of expectancy and told him that he was a fool. Perhaps it was the sight of Mrs. Belville bearing down upon him. Nothing could be worse for a young man than such idling, she cried to him, and he must immediately leave off dreaming in the sunshine and find Helen for her. Helen and her car were required to fetch some things from Semper. Perhaps Adam would like to go, too, to fetch and carry in the town. He and Helen would find her somewhere in or near the hall, up to her knees in the sixes and sevens to which everything that morning had been reduced. After saying all this as if she were merely a worried middle-aged woman playing extra housekeeper for a day and not a good fairy, Mrs. Belville hurried back to the house, and Adam trod the golden air in search of Helen.

He found her among the white roses bending to them a face that glowed like rich ripe fruit. When he was very near, she looked up and smiled at him, and his heart leaped at this merry friendly glance. He remembered that pursuit across the lawn; he at least was not unwelcome. Already, he swore, there was some link between them, as if his morning's thoughts about her had fluttered and called round her head as she had leaned over these roses, their friendship growing mysteriously outside ordinary communication, growing just as this sun was climbing up the sky. His delivery of the message was very sedate and her reception of it very demure, but their eyes were dancing together to some secret tune. Yes, she would go, and of course he could go with her, to fetch and to carry, but first they must each take an armful of white roses to the house. Thus they walked back together with midsummer in their arms, their heads above a cloud of blossom.

"Of course you knew there was someone behind you when you last crossed the lawn?" Adam inquired of her.

She laughed. "Did you see that? Of course I knew. I knew who it was, too. Luckily he was too fat to catch up. I didn't want to have to talk to such a disgustingly fat creature on a morning like this. I loathe those fat men." And she actually gave a little shudder.

He considered this for a moment. "I don't know that that's quite fair. But I don't think people are fair to fatness. It's not necessarily disgusting, you know." Lean as a rake, he felt nobly disinterested. "After all, the Baron's very fat, and you don't find him disgusting and loathsome and all the rest of it, do you?"

"Heavens, no! I've adored him for years." Her face put on a little frown. "And now that I think of it, I've known other fat people I've liked enormously and not found at all disgusting."

"It may be, of course, just because one knows them," Adam threw in, while she was still puzzling it out.

"There are two kinds of fatness," she went on. "Yes, that's it. And one's disgusting and the other's quite jolly."

"Well, but fat's fat, you know, whoever wears it, so to speak." He paused a moment to think. "Perhaps it's a question of personality, what's behind the fat."

She took it up triumphantly. "That's just what it is. I see it now. It all depends on the size of the personality. Some fat men are obviously nothing but mean little creatures who have allowed themselves to be buried in masses of flesh, and they're the disgusting ones. But the others, like the Baron, have to be enormous because they're really enormous themselves inside, so that their fatness is only a kind of richness that's really part of them working itself out in terms of flesh. Those people are fascinating and never loathsome, and you must have noticed that they're always tremendously alive and quite agile however bulky they are. The Baron's like that; you feel that a smaller body wouldn't do for him at all; he must have a colossal helping of everything."

They agreed wonderfully about this, and between them, by the time they had reached the hall, they had settled for ever the question of fatness and fatness. Mrs. Belville came pouncing out upon them, waved away their roses, and flung at them all manner of commissions and directions, which Adam sorted out and tidied up, with the help of pencil and paper, while Helen went round to the garage at the far end of the house for her car. This was the big touring Vauxhall that had rescued him from the inn at Gloam, and now Adam greeted it in the sunshine as if it were a long-lost friend. It was a very solid and sedate machine, but he heard it purring vague promises of adventure, and the very sound of its horn was like the opening of the Fifth Symphony. To climb in and

sit beside Helen, knowing that you were to be there together for the next hour or so, was an adventure in itself, an experience as rich as nougat.

Another second and they would have been moving off, but a cry from the house arrested Helen. They looked up to see the Baron's nose and fantastic little imperial. He seemed colossal as he stood there smiling down upon them. "You're the very people I wanted to see, my children," he remarked. "Where are you going?" After they had told him, he went on: "Everything begins to-day, as you know. To-night, after dinner, there will be a meeting in the library, and if I can bring in the Heir himself to meet these people here, then the rest is easy. I've just heard now on the telephone—it's quite safe because we use a code, one I invented myself, very rich and strange; I must explain it to you sometime—well, I've just heard that he may get through to-day. I've just heard, too, that Hake has left the dale, perhaps in disgust after yesterday's fiasco. Now I expect the heir to ring me up, probably from Gloam Junction, just to say that he's there, sometime this evening, probably during the meeting. I must stay behind to keep the thing going, so I'd like you, Helen, to have the car ready so that you can jump in when I give you the word, rush off to Gloam Junction, or wherever the place is, and return with the hope of England in the back seat. Adam here, who has such an eye for Scotland Yard, had better go with you. You'll be ready after dinner, then?"

Adam saw Helen and himself rushing through the moonlight, and blessed the colossus standing over him who, with a few casual instructions, could send the whole day rocketing. Helen, too, did not look displeased, but all she said was: "Baron, you shall be obeyed. But how shall I your true love know?"

"By his long dark face, and his turned-down nose and his taste for epigram," the Baron lilted in reply. "He's not unlike our own Adam Stewart, only, of course, brighter and wittier and more beautiful. You may be sure he'll be the only person waiting at Gloam Junction with a marked taste for epigrams."

"No doubt," said Helen; "but it takes time to discover such tastes, and the wit may not easily sparkle on the platform of Gloam Junction."

The Baron wagged a fat finger in her face. "You're inclined to be crisp and severe this morning, my dear Helen, and for once I

trace the family likeness between you and our excellent but intimidating Mrs. Belville. However, as a matter of fact, I've thought of that, and therefore—in the words of Bottom the Weaver—I have a device to make all well. When you think your man is before you, you will say to him: 'What is it that we all want?' Then he will reply: 'A Roland for an Oliver.' "

"And a most egotistical device, too!" cried Helen. "I thought that you at least, Baron Roland, would never stoop to these typical masculine vanities."

"I think I see a startled look in your eye, my dear Adam," said the Baron smoothly, "but you must never heed these grossly unfair criticisms: they are only the gnats that issue from the long summer of the feminine mind. As for my device, it is a password and counter-sign so simple that it can be remembered even by giddy youth. It is also a piece of gnomic, even oracular, wisdom, which you will understand when you are both old and grey and battered; though as I look at you now, I can hardly believe that you will ever be those things. Off you go, the pair of you, and be ready to-night." He turned an immense back on them, and in another minute they were gliding away.

The road was almost empty and by this time Helen had come to know every twist and turn of it, so that there was time for talk as they sped down the shining green length of the dale, running between hills that seemed only to be breathed against the sky. Happily they talked together of the Baron and of the lovely crazy things that were now shaping themselves, of what had gone and what might come, of all the people at Runner Hall and of all the odd folk that one or other of them had ever met; and they carried on this laughing exchange all the way down the dale, in and out of shops, and back again and through the late lunch they had together. It was inevitable that it should have been Helen he had seen first, with his foot on the threshold of this magical midsummer day, for this day, perhaps all days to come and all the crying wistful ghosts that had gone and never listened to her laughter, belonged to her. All the show of events, all the people there, and all their talk and their plotting and their antics, seemed nothing now but a delicious comedy of her devising, moving to her music, a play of shadows in her eyes, a charade in the house of life to which she had invited him. Together they shared this

fantastic dream of things, and even when they were separated, when she was out of sight, busy among the roses or lost in the house while he talked idly to some fellow guest, this sense of all things being their dream together did not desert him. So it was all through that day. Not that things now were less real than they had been to him, for however crowded and sumptuous the pageant of the hours had seemed to him before, he had always come at last to find it a shadow show and hollow phantasmagoria, to discover that he was really walking alone in an empty echoing space somewhere behind it all. Reality had simply been that final loneliness, and all else an hour's illusion hastening to defeat. But now that space behind was not empty, no longer did he walk there alone or desolately examine the ledgers of sensation. The old mocking illusion, the pageant that had vanished at one single cry of the heart, was now the quaint charade in which he and Helen happily took part, or the film they stared at as they sat close together in the darkened theatre of this inner life.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE MOONFLIGHT

HAVING marched with ever-increasing pomp through the three gateways of port, brandy and coffee, and having wandered with many a loud ha-ha through the fragrant jungle of cigar smoke, the men were now straggling out of the dining-room and moving towards the library, where the meeting was to be held. To Adam, the dinner had been a noisy, idle dream, through which he had nursed all manner of sweet muddled thoughts, chiefly of Helen, who had sat at the other side of the table, a radiant figure in crimson. He had hoped to have secured a place by her side, and because he had failed, through no fault of his, nor, he told himself, of hers, he had borne a grudge against the whole dinner and had determined that it should be a mere flicker on the surface of his attention. As course followed course, as the stream of wine quickened from sherry to champagne and finally ebbed away in the dark and somnolent tide of port, as the talk grew louder and swifter and the laughter rang out, under cover of the idlest masquerade of interest he hugged to himself, gloated over, those glances of Helen's that came to rest so exquisitely upon him from time to time. They alone meant something. For the rest, everything now hung on his taking his place by her side for the remainder of the evening, and that place he meant to have if he had to fight his way to it, unless, of course, she herself refused it to him. But that was unthinkable, a whole new world crashing to ruin.

No doubt the affair had gone off splendidly. Even Mrs. Belville had had rising hopes of it. "My dear Adam, I'm really beginning to believe a little in this conspiracy," she had told him between tea and dinner, "for a society that can dine as this one will to-night is not altogether fantastic and ephemeral. Seven excellent courses; Veuve Cliquot and Pol Roger, both sweet and dry; and three extra waiters, most sober and respectable men that Siddell has

discovered at Lobley and brought over in a car; all these things are not to be lightly dismissed, and suggest, for one evening at least, a certain solidity in this absurd cause. The Baddeley-Fragges have risen to the occasion, though I must say that Siddell and I should also receive congratulations."

"I came here originally, you know, to stay in little country inns," he had said to her, "and I've no things here. I hope we're not supposed to dress to-night?" It was queer how fatuous little remarks of this kind remained, with all their attendant circumstances, in the memory. That moment kept returning to him and he could hear himself saying again "I hope we're not supposed to dress to-night?" Perhaps he would remember it years hence, when all manner of important events had faded from remembrance. But she had left him easy in mind by replying: "No, as so many people are merely on the wing, the men aren't asked to dress."

Now it had come and gone, no doubt a very fine dinner indeed, under the circumstances, probably a most successful function. But to him it had been a mere idle interlude, a buzz of talk and a tinkling of glasses, and the real evening was beginning now that he had crossed this wilderness of time, nearly half an hour, since he had seen Helen vanish amid a rustle of silks and they were all moving over to the library. The mere thought of this move had excited him before, but now, as he actually went through the door, a strange calm took possession of him.

He had never been in the library before. It was a long low-ceilinged room facing the drawing-room across the hall, its windows looking out upon the semicircular sweep of gravel before the front door. The walls were rich with books and prints and the glimmer of porcelain and old pewter. All the treasures of the morning, white roses and the belated lilac, were heaped in dim old willow-pattern bowls, and the darkening air was heavy with their fragrance. Above the cavernous fireplace, which was not far from the door and at the narrow end of the room, were clusters of slim candles, unlighted as yet, clear-cut against the panelling; and here and there were tiny constellations of silhouettes, and old portraits, just a dull gleam of gold round indistinguishable faces. Adam stood for a moment at the door, idly noting these and other details, but above all absorbing the atmosphere of the

place. Not only was this library the largest room in the house, it was also the loveliest, a room that seemed much older than all the others, brimmed with an antique grace and kindness, so that looking into it, remarking its exquisite memorials of the past, the flotsam and jetsam stranded on its shore, you seemed to hear the ebbing of the slow kindly tide of years. And now to-night, after a long silence, it was to be plunged into the world of affairs. It looked half-hearted, almost afraid.

A table had been placed a little way in front of the fireplace, and there were two or three chairs behind this table. All the others, with a settee or two, were ranged in front, and now gaped expectantly, with an unavoidable suggestion of amateur theatricals. Most of the women had already entered but had not yet taken their places. They were grouped at the back of the room, chattering. The rest of the men, with the exception of the Baron, Sir Arthur and Siddell, had come crowding in after Adam and were now talking together or wandering about the room, peering here and there, in the aimless fashion of all people summoned to a strange apartment and left idle for a time. At last the group of women at the other end dissolved, and Adam saw the scarlet detach itself from the multi-coloured mass of silks. Helen turned to survey the room, looked meaningly at Adam, and after gracefully eluding one or two detached males, moved slowly down the far side of the room towards the nearer window. Adam, now one great heart-beat, joined her. She patted the window-seat.

"I'm going to sit here," she said softly.

"Then so am I," he announced with decision, though his voice was a trifle husky. "I'll bag a few cushions."

They settled themselves comfortably in the window. Adam was almost afraid to speak less some chance word should break the spell that brought them so close together.

Helen looked out through the open window and he followed her glance. There, not three yards away, was her car. They had only to swing out their legs, take two strides, and they were in it. "It's all ready," she said, very quietly. "That's why I thought we'd sit here. If we're wanted—well, out we go, without any fuss. And somehow I feel that we shall be. Something's going to happen."

"I hope so." He looked at her and then smiled, very shyly,

and was rewarded by the tiny dimple he now knew so well. She leaned forward on one rounded arm, and together they looked out through the serene air, the chatter of the others dying away behind them.

"It's going to be a lovely night," she whispered.

The garden was dreaming in that lingering half-light he had noticed before here at this hour, when the long midsummer day seemed to lighten suddenly and then remain pallid and still before it finally flickered out. The distant hill that could be seen beyond the garden's jagged and darkening horizon of leaf was dusted with plum-bloom, and not very far above the last blue line was the rim of the rising moon, a wisp of pale gilt tissue.

"What a curious light this is!" he said. "Not ordinary twilight at all. There's something queer, unearthly, about it."

Helen nodded. "Yes, it can be quite frightening sometimes. It's too pale and quiet; you feel there's something sinister going on behind it. I've noticed it particularly up here, and it seems the people round here have a name for this light. They call it 'edge o' dark.' Isn't that just the name for it?"

"Edge o' dark," he murmured, and suddenly saw the world as an eerie place.

"Yes, we're sitting on—or is it 'in'?—the edge o' dark." And she showed him enormous, solemn, brown eyes, glimpses of hollow night, through which, however, her adorable laughing self contrived to peep. "Let us see what is happening to the conspirators."

They faced about and saw that nearly everyone now was seated. "Isn't it queer," Helen whispered, "how all the people in little audiences, at meetings like this or tiny church services or musical evenings, always look absurd and rather shamefaced, as if they knew they were ridiculous, whereas the people in huge audiences, who are usually still more ridiculous, are entirely unconscious of the fact and always look grand and important?"

"What a delightful room, this is!" Adam exclaimed, staring about him again.

"Like a lovely old tune," she replied. "I've always adored it. It belongs to the really old part of the house, you know, and it's the only really civilized thing for miles."

"It doesn't seem very keen on this meeting," he

remarked, eyeing the room reflectively.

"How delightful of you to notice that!" She sparkled at him. "Of course it doesn't. It looks like an aristocratic old lady on a visit to her stockbroker's. The 'lards,' of course, are entirely out of place."

"And yet, you know," Adam began, enjoying the very sound of his own voice, deliberate, friendly, so sure of the sensitive listener, "and yet, after all this is no ordinary meeting. If long-lost Stuarts are to turn up, walking in from the night to ask for the crown, this is the very place for them."

"I should think it is. Can't you see the pale, clear-cut, regal profile against that dark panelling? What a pity it isn't going to be Bonnie Prince Charlie, complete with bonnet, kilt, and white cockade! I've tried hard, but I really can't imagine what this young man will be like. And the Baron can't—or won't—describe him."

"All I know about him," Adam blurted out, not altogether happy about her interest in this romantic young stranger, "is that he has been a conjurer."

A soft little trill of laughter came from Helen. "A conjurer! Who told you that?"

"The Baron." He felt a little guilty now. "It was in confidence, and I ought not to have repeated it."

"But he told me, also in confidence," Helen cried softly, "that this young man is—or had been—an officer in the merchant service. I remember remarking how glad I was, because I adore sailors. He could hardly be both, could he?"

Adam shook his head meditatively. "There's something queer about all this. I've thought so from the first."

"I too. It's just like the Baron. I believe nothing now until I actually encounter this mysterious youth. It would not surprise me if——" her voice trailed away. They looked at one another for a moment or so, wandered hand-in-hand through vast regions of eternal doubt. Then she whispered, with an air of disclosing the most delicious secret in the world: "I don't really care, though. It's been delightful, and so long as the Baron has it in hand, it will go on being delightful. Without him, nothing would ever happen here. And look!—it's all beginning." And she settled herself in her corner with a tiny jump, clasping her hands in her lap, and was at once so lovely and charmingly sophisticated, and

yet so like an eager little girl at a show, that Adam could have cried out his adoration, bellowed forth her name and the marvellous quality of her, to the whole room.

The butler was lighting all the candles above the fireplace, moving slowly from sconce to sconce with a taper and leaving behind him yellow constellations, unwavering in the windless air. Two waiters covered the table with a green baize cloth and arranged pens, ink, blotting-pads and paper upon it. A third arrived, followed by the Baron, Sir Arthur, and Siddell, and heaped a multitude of papers and three small dispatch boxes upon the table. The Baron added two attaché cases. Then the butler took down two lighted candelabra and set one at each end of the table. All this was performed in complete silence and with a deliberation of movement that suggested ritual or the setting of a stage after the curtain had been raised. Helen watched these proceedings with eyes that grew darker in the deepening candle-light. "You know," she whispered, "there ought to be soft music going on somewhere just outside—something by Scarlatti for harpsichord and strings. Isn't it a perfect light for eighteenth-century comedy?"

"It's a perfect light for anything," said Adam, looking at her intently.

"I feel that at any moment," she went on, softly, "a patched and powdered lady in lilac satin will enter, followed by a maid with cherry-coloured ribbons, who will hand her a note and then admit a gentleman in salmon pink, perhaps one of those there." And she nodded towards the portraits, no longer indistinguishable. Adam looked at them idly. One stood out, being nearer and clearer than the others, the head and shoulders of a long-nosed, tight-lipped fellow in a wig and a blue coat and with a crisp little eye and a lean but crimson cheek, who probably commanded a frigate in the old French wars when Nelson was a lad, and had gone goutily to the grave more than a hundred years ago, being nothing now but a portrait and a name in a churchyard. To Adam he was not even a name, just a face on the wall stared at in an idle moment. But though so many faces, faces that had talked with him and smiled when he smiled, were to pass out of his mind, this face he was not to forget, and many a time afterwards it returned to him, vivid in that lost candle-light, and always brought

with it such a queerly poignant feeling that at last it seemed to him that he and this dead-and-gone unknown had companioned one another through some long ordeal.

But now he turned from the faces of pigment on the wall to the irradiated face, warm flesh and blood yet glamorous as a dream, so near to him. He glanced at feature after feature, quite coolly, for now it seemed to him that these were not her very self but only something that she wore, a vesture of subtly modelled and coloured flesh, and that it was not they themselves, but what shone through them, that so strangely excited him. Emboldened by this thought and by some hint of urgency in the hour, he said to her, softly but with decision: "Helen Maythorn, your nose has the tiniest tilt at the end of it, and the dimple in your left cheek is slightly larger than the one in your right, and sometimes your mouth seems very small and sometimes quite big, and you have one strand of hair that always looks as if it wanted to come down but never does . . ." He broke off. She was looking at him, almost through him, very haughtily. He began to be alarmed.

Then she melted. "Adam Stewart, once a wandering knight and now merely an impudent boy, your nose is long and rather crooked, and the point of your chin is not in line with it, but wanders away to the right, and one of your eyebrows is slightly higher than the other, and you have a little mole on the left side of your neck, and your hair, though not bad on the whole, is not very nicely trimmed at the back. And that, I think, is quite enough of that." And she tilted her chin and looked away from him, sweet indifference itself, leaving him to gasp at this rapid and astonishing catalogue. Who would have thought that she had noticed anything about him, let alone these details?

"Helen, my dear." It was the Baron standing before them. "I have never seen you looking lovelier. You might be sitting with the dusk of Ilium behind you. Every time I've looked across at you, I've heard those thousand ships crashing into the water. And if this is what an old man, with a battered antique heart now bound in brass, can feel about you, I tremble to think to what state of mind you've reduced this young man sitting by your side." And then lowering his voice: "I take it you're ready if that bell should ring?" He was shown the car waiting outside. "Admirable! I've held up this conference as long as I could in the hope of

hearing that telephone. Now we shall have to begin. And if he can't get here to-night, all this will have been so much wasted time. Our friends, the new arrivals, insist upon seeing him before they make the slightest move. They demand—two of them told me so—what they call 'the goods.' I am asked to deliver, for the first time in my life, 'the goods.' These people, you know, have spent all their years wanting and getting these goods of theirs. They have always lived in a warehouse and not in a world. They and I speak two different languages."

Helen regarded him steadily. "Baron," she said softly, "you're not happy about things to-night, my dear."

Coughs that were like nudges, murmurs of impatience, now came from behind his back. "Perhaps I have listened too long for the little stroke of a bell," he said. "I feel an ebbing somewhere to-night. But let us take heart, my dear. You will always be shining there outside things, illuminating them, and I will always be in the very thick of it inside, and neither of us can be removed or changed. And as for Adam Stewart here, who is listening to my words, but half in a dream, staring at your face, let us hope that he will always be where he is now, sitting between us, listening to me, dreaming over you, with a hand for each of us. And now the show begins."

He went to the table and took his place there with Sir Arthur and Siddell. There was a general shuffling of chairs and feet as the company settled itself to listen. Adam ran his eye over the little assembly. There were a few people sitting between him and the table, and these were only so many bent heads, but all the others were plainly visible from the window-seat. A queer crew! Yet for all but the newcomers he began to feel an affection as face after face caught his glance. They began to wear the look of old friends: Lady Baddeley-Fragge, sitting there in a thin faded dream; the foolish eager face of Miss Satterly; the wooden Major, bolt upright; Templake, nervous, fidgeting, waiting for the world to be saved; Hooby, moonishly contemplating this new little alcove in the museum of life; Lady Matchways, looking fragile and indomitable to the last, unable to conceal her impatience at having to sit there doing nothing; and Mrs. Belville, demure of mouth but commanding two bright blue eyes that missed nothing and could be almost heard reporting to their

resolute and humorous captain. Adam had a sudden daft desire to go round and shake them all by the hand.

Sir Arthur stood up, a brittle figure, and cleared his throat. "Ladies and Gentlemen," he began, with almost luxurious ease. But then he stopped, looked across at Helen as if he had a vague idea that she ought not to have been there, fumbled for his eye-glasses, and then went on: "Er—this is, as I am sure most of you are aware, er—the greatest moment in the history of our society, the Companions of the Rose. Indeed, our work—our real work—begins now. Before this—er—conference ends to-night, it will have become a great historic occasion." At which Helen, without taking her eyes off the speaker or moving a muscle of her face, gave Adam a lightning nudge. "Our—er—general policy, the lines on which we must—er—work from now onwards, will be discussed by Baron Roland, but before he begins—er—I will call upon our new organizer, Mr. Siddell, to—er—make a statement regarding the—er—position of the society. In view of the increased—er—work, it was decided to appoint a professional organizer, sympathetic to the cause, of course, whose duty it would be—er—to appoint and—er—control agents in various parts of the country, and—be responsible for the finances and—er—so forth. Mr. Siddell came to us with—er—the very highest references, and though he has—er—only been with us a few days, we have—er—every reason to be more than satisfied with—er—what he has already accomplished." Here there was some applause, led by Mrs. Belville, who obviously had in mind the dinner arrangements and the extra waiters. "I will now," said Sir Arthur, "call upon Mr. Siddell to make his statement."

Siddell sprang to his feet and walked round to one side of the table, standing with his back to the door and facing the whole company. To Adam's astonishment, he had leaped at one bound from being a pale mystery into a real and very decided person. He had hardly opened his mouth before you seemed to see his personality taking shape and colour. His eyes snapped at them. There was an edge to his voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, his glance swiftly travelling round the room. "I'm delighted to learn that you are pleased with my work here. I'm not dissatisfied with it myself, though it has been far more difficult than any of you imagine." He paused for

a moment, smiling, while one or two of his audience gasped at the conceit of this young man. "It's a pleasure to me to explain to you the present position of this society. You have been told that this is the greatest moment in its history. That is true. It is, I think, also its last. No, sir, kindly keep your seat," he cried sharply, turning round and flinging out a long forefinger at the Baron, who had uttered a cry and sprung to his feet, comprehension dawning in his face.

"Come in," Siddell cried. The door behind him immediately opened, and there, crowded in the doorway were the three waiters, and standing behind them, peeping in and grinning over their shoulders, were Hake and Sergeant Rundle. A hundred little suspicions that had been lurking some time at the back of Adam's mind now rushed together to become one screaming certainty. So this was the end of it all.

"Now please keep your seats," Siddell commanded. "We have power to arrest any person who interferes with us in any way. I may also point out that we are armed, though it ought not to be necessary to mention the fact in this company. But to resume my statement. I have a complete record of the activities of this society and of all the persons engaged in those activities, and this record will be handed over to the authorities who sent me here—with such splendid references. Not only that, but the young gentleman you were expecting to-night will not arrive; he has been conducted elsewhere."

His audience had been merely bewildered before, but now there broke out a hubbub of dismay, so that he was compelled to stop. He raised his hand for silence, but without effect for some time. After resuming his seat, the Baron had been sitting stonily, one arm resting on the table, a monument of frustration, but now, during this loud, confused interval, he raised his head, Adam noticed, and looked meaningly across at the two of them perched on the window-seat. Then the hand on the table lifted a finger, very deliberately, as if it were a signal. What did it mean? Had Helen seen it, too? He glanced at her and their eyes met to read the same question and answer. Neither knew what was meant by that lifted finger, but the sight of it had made them both suddenly rigid, tense, with a new watchfulness.

At last Siddell contrived to silence the dismayed assembly and

went on with his speech. "The recent activities of this society," he observed smoothly, "have obviously long passed the point at which they might be tolerated by the authorities. Historical sentimentalism is one thing, and active conspiracy against the existing order quite another thing. In any other country most of you would now have considerable terms of imprisonment to look forward to, but the authorities have decided to proceed leniently. On this occasion they will not prosecute, but I have been instructed to say that any further activities of this kind on the part of anyone present here to-night will be regarded and dealt with as a very serious offence." He surveyed them coldly, his tones the very voice of formal authority. "No further meeting of the society must take place, and after to-night there will be no more Companions of the Rose; all its papers will be confiscated; it is finished."

"Not yet!" roared the Baron, leaping to his feet. "Catch this!" He picked up an attaché case and hurled it across to Adam, who as he caught it heard the final command: "Now run!" It was all over in three seconds. The place was now in an uproar, all of them jumping to their feet. Siddell shouting to his men and trying to push his way through a huddle of chairs and people.

The moment Adam had caught the case Helen had cried "Come on!" and had immediately swung herself out of the window and leaped into the car. Adam followed her and flung himself and the case into the back. It was her own familiar car and Helen moved like lightning, but inevitably some moments were lost while she started the engine and threw in the gear, and the car had only just begun to move when someone—it must have been Siddell—came flying through the window and jumped for the footboard. But Adam, leaning forward at the back and dancing with impatience, gave the fellow a hard push before he had time to grasp the side and sent him reeling back. Above the noise, as they shot forward, Adam heard a peal of laughter from the room behind: it sounded like Mrs. Belville. As the car turned towards the drive, rocking as it gathered speed, Adam looking back saw two men come running out of the front door, and waited for their onset, gloriously full of battle now and determined not to be stopped if all Scotland Yard jumped on the footboard. But the men were too late. There was a click of gears; the car jerked forward and ate up the drive; and a minute later they were streaming down the road.

Helen switched on the lights and steadily accelerated, only slowing up a little when she turned a sharp corner, where a sign-post pointed the way to Lobley, but after that speeding up along a fairly straight ascent for about two miles. So far they had not exchanged a word. Helen was busily engaged with the car, and Adam, still sprawling at the back, had no inclination to disturb her. Never before had he felt so exhilarated: the glorious minute at the window, the rushing air, the lovely wide night spreading before him, and Helen there, always Helen, winging him out of that disastrous collapse into their own free leagues of moonlight, the two of them crashing through those narrowing, closing walls, bursting out of what you would call Siddellism, into a flight that was like a fairy tale; under these strokes of fortune his mind went happily reeling. At first he had been dazed, his mind still wandering in the ruins of the evening's conference, the cold even tones of Siddell, the Baron's cry, still lodging in his ears, but now with every flying yard and swelling minute of their escape together, its splendour grew. Its promise filled the wide sweet-smelling space, the old enchanted palace of midsummer night, whose lovely things, the carpet of the fields, the faded dark-green tapestry of hills, the great golden crazy lamp swung in the blue, grew lovelier still.

At the summit of the road, she stopped the car and stood up, turning towards him and holding out her arms. Staring, he caught his breath. She gave a little gasp, and then he saw that she was shivering. "I *am* cold," she said. "You'll find a coat of mine there somewhere, and an old hat." He handed them over. "This, of course, is absolutely mad," she went on, slipping on her coat, "but I wouldn't have missed it for worlds. I suppose they'll be coming after us?"

"Oh, certain to do," he replied. "They've got one car of their own and could easily commandeer one of the others."

"I believe I can hear something. Yes, look!" She pointed down the road; lights were flashing round the distant corner. "Two cars there, travelling quickly, too. It's almost sure to be Siddell and company. I hope he's raging. Come and sit in front."

He climbed over and took his place by her side. She sent the car humming down the long, easy descent, gathering speed all the way. At the bottom she asked him to look round and see if they

were visible yet over the hill. He turned but saw nothing, and it was not until they were half-way up the next slope, which mounted to a gap in the fells, that he saw the lights on the hill behind. "There they are now!" he cried. "They must be dropping behind." He thought he saw her smile at him as he knelt there on the seat, an excited and happy fugitive.

"We should be able to outrun them," she said, reflectively.

"Oh, easily, with this car!" He might have just made it himself for her.

"But that hill will have slowed them down, and now they have a chance of making it up again."

"Well, this hill will slow them down again; and it's worse than the other one."

"Yes, but I want to leave them well behind now." She had to raise her voice. "There's a cross-roads at the other side of this hill and I don't want them to see which way we take. They'll think we've gone straight on, through Lobley, whereas we'll cut off to the left and miss Lobley altogether."

"A great scheme!" he shouted, for now they were roaring up the last and steepest part of the hill.

It was strange how this exchange of brief impersonal remarks affected him. These ordinary loose phrases, spoken without feeling, casually flung from one to the other, seemed to him, the moment they had gone, utterances of the deepest significance, things whispered at the very core of life. Their commonplace air was the merest disguise, for they were a part of the night, and this was a night of innumerable dimensions, doubly and trebly burdened with fatefulness; it gave you glimpses of layer after layer of meaning; and the lightest thing in it cast strange troubling shadows. Not that he really saw those shadows until afterwards, for now he had found happiness and, of course, did not know that he had found it, did not know that he was carrying it with him, rushing through the air, a ball of thinnest blown glass balanced on his hand.

They sped over the hill and then down the grey river that their own twin moons transformed into flashing walls and dust and leafage and then hurled into space. At last the cross-roads shone before them, and they turned to the left down a narrower winding road that only went jogging past them.

Standing up, Adam could see the last summit they had crossed. "Their lights are not even showing over the hill," he proclaimed triumphantly.

"That gives us a chance then," she replied, preoccupied with the twisting road.

They passed through a tiny village, so remote from sound or movement that it might have been in a toyshop window. Just outside a single pedestrian lifted a blank face to their lamps and then was gone, leaving them an empty road. Not a word was spoken now between them as they went softly throbbing into the blue bubble of the night. Helen sat quietly behind her wheel, guiding their little world along its narrow winding way. Adam was silent by her side, sometimes turning from the passing glimmer of tree and field to glance at her, and soon this became for him a dream-like double journey. Everything thinned out and melted into one vague mass that was half a mood and half a blur of sensation. Never could he have told how many miles and minutes they left behind them on that road. The engine softly drumming beneath his feet and the moon sailing above his head kept time for him and measured their conquered space, but all the while these things were receding and turning into sounds and sights wavering in the background of a dream. The Helen sitting by his side was now only a dark shell, for it seemed that her real being, the unique spirit of her, had escaped and expanded until it broadened out over the whole dim world and became at last its very atmosphere. His sense of her, was itself a soft radiance, filtering through his vague vision of things, and so he sailed on through a moonlight he had not known before.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE LAST ESCAPE

WHEN he wakened again to the outer world, they had come to the end of that narrow winding lane at last, and were now turning to the right down a straight, gleaming highway. Immediately everything was changed. No longer was Helen a mystery abroad in the night, but a warm, breathing girl at his side. She, too, must have felt some change in the atmosphere, for she stirred, shook herself a little, glanced casually about her while the car went placidly down the easy road.

"Where are we going?" Adam asked.

"And why are we here?" she laughed. Then eagerly, as if newly released from some prohibition of speech, they fell to talking of the night's adventure. They described to one another all the events of the meeting, took the whole affair up in their hands and twisted it this way and that, and happily compared their sensations at every stage of the proceedings. Adam upbraided himself for having kept so quiet about Siddell, of whom, he declared boldly, he had been suspicious from the very first. Helen brooded, half tenderly, half mockingly, over the whole field of stricken Companions.

"I wonder what the Baron is doing, poor darling!" she mused.

"Thinking out a new conspiracy for somewhere, I hope," Adam said fervently. "He was glorious at the end. If it hadn't been for him, we shouldn't be here now."

"Why, do you like being here now?" She showed him an innocent profile.

"It's the most marvellous thing that's ever happened," he cried. "I wouldn't be elsewhere for worlds. And you said that yourself some time ago."

"Did I?" There was mocking music in the query. She was now steering them through a village, and they almost went the whole length of it before she resumed. "Well, I should have hated

giving in to that man Siddell, doing nothing but just sitting there gaping under his supercilious nose and those pale, cold eyes of his. At least he won't be quite so sure of himself now, and we've had fun, besides having saved valuable dispatches or records or whatever there is in that bag from the police. It's obviously the end of the society and the great conspiracy and everything, but the Baron and you and I have prevented it from being a tame ending. And now, I suppose, Master Adam, you and I are the last Companions of the Rose."

"Except, you know, that I never really was one," he put in, very happy, though, at the conjunction she suggested.

"And now, when I think of it, neither was I," she said. "I only came in as a sort of ally at the last moment, having heard so much about it from Uncle Geoffrey and Peter, and dying to see the Baron again and to join in one of his crazy affairs." They ran smoothly on for a while in silence.

Adam had been trying to puzzle things out. "It's odd, you know," he began, slowly, "that when the whole thing collapsed at the end almost at a touch from Siddell and his famous 'authorities,' I wasn't really surprised. Yet I ought to have been, for I'd done so much dodging about with Hake and old Rundle, had eluded them so easily, that I had begun to think of them as a pair of old fools and everything they stood for, everything we were conspiring against, the whole law and order business, as something very clumsy and stupid and, you know, rather unreal. But it was there all the time, real enough, and waiting to pounce upon us; and, as I say, when it did pounce, in spite of my previous feeling about it, I wasn't really very surprised."

"I don't think, though," she said, now as serious as he was, "that what you call the law and order business, though, as you say, it's there all the time, apparently solid and enormous, and dangerous to despise or overlook, is as real as our plotting and planning and adventuring by moonlight. It seems so tremendous because everybody joins everybody else in pretending that it is, but it's not so real inside, you know. It's a mere convenience really, and not something to be happy about for its own sake; a sheer joy, like some kinds of work and play and relations with people, and so it doesn't actually take hold of life. Nor has it really crushed our society of the Rose, which, like the Baron, will

pop up as something else very soon, even though it seems to have vanished now like a queer, lovely little dream."

"It hasn't really vanished with me," Adam said, eagerly. "And now I see why." He paused for a moment.

"Tell me."

"Because you're with me, Helen. If I'd escaped by myself or with anyone else there, except the Baron, perhaps, it would have all collapsed now, would be just something to look back upon, but because you're here everything that was so glamorous and delightful about the conspiracy there, the fascinating spirit of the thing, still exists for me. I see that now."

She startled him by sounding the horn, though there was only a vacant length in front of them. "And I see, young man," she said, very sternly, "that you're on the very brink of making love to me."

"I'm not. At least"—he went on, confused but dogged, "I don't know whether I am or not. But I do know I'm trying to tell you honestly what I think about it all."

"You adorable child!" the bewildering creature exclaimed. And then, demurely penitent, she added: "I'm sorry, Mr. Stewart. Now tell me what you honestly think about it all."

The old feminine reducing glass was being held over him; he saw himself diminished to childishness; if he stopped, he must take refuge in a babyish, sulky silence, and if he went on, he would now be prattling at her knee. But he was determined to unburden himself.

"I see now that you began it all for me," he said slowly. "It was you who gave me the character, the quality, of the thing, who covered it with glamour, crammed music and colour into it. The Baron, too, of course, did a lot in his own way, but that was afterwards. You know how one instrument in an orchestra, a lonely first violin or a clarinet high up somewhere, will suddenly announce a theme in the middle of a scramble of sound, and as soon as you hear it you know that that is the great theme, and that after all kinds of adventures it will gradually take hold of the whole orchestra and come thundering out at last as if it were the only tune in the world. Well, just the sight of you, and overhearing one or two of the funny little remarks you made, began it, announced that theme for me. When I remember the other

afternoon—though it seems ages and ages ago, by the way—when I first saw you in St. Pancras——"

"And now I, too, remember," she interrupted, still looking ahead and nonchalantly turning her wheel, "I remember a very rude, staring young man at a carriage window. If I had thought for a moment . . ." And her voice departed into an Arctic silence.

"But surely you knew——!" he began, alarmed. Then he saw that he was being teased. He ought to have seen it before, but it was strange how this girl contrived not only to deprive him of any mastery of a familiar situation, but to leave him floundering after her as if he were half-witted. But this was only on the surface, where mere tactics were of so much importance; underneath that, inside, he had never felt so strong and wise before, nor known how easy it was to take all life between his two hands.

They went humming into a wood, and there, as the moonlight ebbed from the road and the dark foliage closed over their heads, he struggled again to beat out his thought. "You see, what seemed to me so fascinating in the cause itself I recognize now as the atmosphere you carry about with you, Helen. Not everything about it, because the Baron did something"—he hesitated a moment—"Peter, too, perhaps. The more obvious, adventurous part was theirs, but the real spirit of the affair, half poetry and half a lovely farce—like a midsummer night's dream—was something I saw dancing in your eyes and singing away in your voice there, right at the beginning, in St. Pancras. What I caught a glimpse of then was something I didn't understand then—I don't say I understand it properly now—but something that I was somehow desperately missing from life. I was absolutely miserable when you went away, and I told myself that it was because I wanted to be 'in' something—that's how I put it—and was never so delighted as when things began to happen. I've only realized to-day that it was really you who gave it all character, its colour and light; I didn't realize it before, not even when you came in that first night and gave me the rose, or the next morning when I heard you singing as you went through the hall. But I believe now that wherever you are, there too I should find that atmosphere. The conspiracy, or at least the happiest part of it, was only your—what shall I say?—quality, character, atmosphere, spirit, translated into

a sort of mad politics, into action, adventure. That's why to me there's really been no collapse—because you're still with me, or rather because I'm still by your side. I'm sorry, of course, about the Baron and—and Peter—and the others—though it doesn't matter about the Baron because I don't ever see him being defeated by anything, do you?—but you're here, and so the Siddells and the Hakes and the Canon Drewbridges have lost the last trick so far as I'm concerned." He ended weakly because a sudden sense of the unreality of his thought, or any thought, took possession of him. He heard his own voice idiotically going on, the drone of a daft phantasm, in that little inner night of the wood through which they cut their way with a broad scimitar of light.

"The wood opens out a little further along; there's a kind of glade," Helen said quietly, "and I'm going to stop there for a few minutes. I'm rather tired."

The question was dangerous—it might splinter the enchanted night—but he was compelled by something stronger than mere curiosity to ask it. "By the way"—and then he hesitated—"where are we going?"

"We're going home," she replied. "To my home, that is, which is only about fifteen miles or so further on, at a place called King's End. You must remember that besides being a Jacobite and a midnight fugitive, I'm a householder and ratepayer and a voter. Strictly speaking, I'm none of those things, not even a voter yet, but you know what I mean."

"Yes, I suppose I'd forgotten you were all those things," he said slowly. "And so we're going to King's End? Well, it's obviously the place for the last two Companions of the Rose. Fateful name—King's End."

She had begun to slow up the car. "I hadn't thought of that," she confessed. "I believe it has that name because some Saxon king is supposed to have been killed there; I don't know which one, because I've never been able to take the slightest interest in Saxon kings."

"No, they're dull, I admit," he remarked, rather as if he was partly responsible for them, "though I remember being a furious partisan of theirs when I was at school. I was always dead against all invading Danes and Normans. Now I've forgotten all about the poor old Saxons."

Helen had now brought the car to a standstill at the side of the road, a few yards past the point where a broad woodland track ran across it. "This will do, I think," she said, "and now I'm getting out." They both descended and shook out their bodies until they were once more uncomplaining, upright forms. This was the little glade that Helen had mentioned. In full sunlight, with the ground burnished with gold and a soft green distance everywhere, you could have played *As You Like It* here, fleeting the time carelessly to your heart's content under these leaves. The grass and the unstirring woodland air were marvellously sweet-smelling; the old happy enchantment of the forest had not utterly vanished; but now there were only vague, broken glances of moonlight where the day's gold might have been strewn along the ground, and deep shadow, black velvet dimly spangled here and there with leaf-shapes, where the woodland might have hung its far transparencies of green. Adam walked forward a few paces and then sat down upon a fallen log. Helen remained standing a little way off, nothing but a vague shape. For a minute or two they were as quiet as the trees; leagues of night bore down upon them.

"This is very lovely," Adam said at last, "but it makes me feel sad, I think. It's full of tiny whispering ghosts, and is all that's left of a long-lost Arcadia. I feel that we've come here a thousand years too late."

"You can feel that even though I'm here—and after all you've said!" It was her voice—there would never be another like it—and he heard in it the old faint mockery, yet it seemed to come as a whisper out of the immensity.

"It's because you're here, I think, I do feel it, a kind of curious lovely ache. If I were here alone, this place would be just a sickening desolation; and if anyone else but you were with me, it would probably be so many trees and yards of ground and so much night air, the last halt before we reached King's End. It's that, anyhow."

"It's what?"

"The last halt before we reach King's End," he repeated a little mournfully. "I don't like the sound of the phrase."

They were silent again. Then she stirred and a tiny voice said: "I wonder what there is in that bag?"

"Bag?" And then he laughed at himself. He had forgotten the

very existence of that attaché case whose rescue had first sent them out in flight together. "Oh, the case! Filled with papers, I suppose, the society's records, lists of people and what not, those documents that Siddell said he would confiscate."

"I wonder if it's locked?"

"Sure to be, I should think. The Baron must have attached great importance to it or he would not have sent us off with it."

"I want to look inside." It was the very voice of round-eyed innocence with just the subtlest suggestion of parody; and immediately it turned Adam into the clumsy, blustering male.

"Well, I don't know that we ought——" he began; then hesitated, and tried again: "You can't—it's sure to be locked."

"Even if it is locked, the key may be there," she said, coming closer. "We've every right to see what there is inside. We represent the society now, and we must know what it is we've rescued from Siddell, otherwise we shan't know what to do. There may be some instructions inside. The Baron may have been prepared for such an emergency as we've had to-night; it would be just like him to be and to give us all manner of romantic directions. I'm going to look inside if I can. Where is it?"

"I'll get it for you," said Adam, who returned to the car and, after some few moments' groping, discovered the attaché case where he had left it in the far corner of the back seat. Meanwhile, Helen had followed him to switch on the big headlights. "Bring it over into the light," she commanded, still standing in the car. He walked round to the front and looked at the case in the full glare of the light.

"Is there a key?" she asked, looking down on him. He held up the tiny key that had been fastened to the handle. "There you are then!" she cried triumphantly. "That obviously means we're to open it. Quick now, Adam!" She hurried out of the car.

His curiosity now matched hers, for the case had rattled queerly as he had carried it round, and he unlocked it with all speed, bending over it in the light. "Well?" she cried, joining him as he stared down at the open case. Still amazed, he held it out for her to see.

"Two paper packets and a bottle," he announced, and looked at her in astonishment.

"Nothing else?" She poked about inside, but there was nothing

beyond the two packets and the bottle.

"Are these the last records of the Rose Companions?" he asked, and they stared at one another and then again at the open case. "Perhaps these are documents disguised as a snack? The Baron might easily do that."

She shook her head. "No, I don't think they are. And this, I think, is just like the Baron." She took out the bottle, and examined it. "It's wine," she trilled. "There's a label on it. Yes, it's a half-bottle of Chambertin."

"And these, I think, are sandwiches," said Adam, who had put down the case and was looking into the two paper packets. "Yes, they are! Sandwiches!"

She came peeping round. "What kind? Are they good? Bite one and see."

He was adrift, clutching the last spar of sober sense while crazy seas washed over him. But he found himself taking a bite and then crying: "Jolly good! Ham."

"Heavenly!" breathed the lovely creature, bending towards him; and then, as he looked into her great, shining eyes: "I adore them."

"But what . . .?" he stammered, his last spar gone.

"We're going to eat them, of course," she cried. "Aren't you hungry? I am. They couldn't have arrived at a better time. And the wine, too!" She whisked away.

He gaped after her. "But I don't understand . . ."

"There's a little folding cup here somewhere," she was calling from the car. "What is it you don't understand? You shouldn't be always wanting to understand. Not that it matters, because one doesn't have to understand sandwiches, particularly ham sandwiches. Ah, here's the cup. Now bring the sandwiches along, and we'll have supper on that log."

As he crossed over with the food, still moonstruck, he thought he heard her laughing softly in the darkness. Then he leaped to a full and vivid perception of their situation; he saw the two of them there in this buried heart of the woodland, this night within a night, with their daft bag; his mind went running madly back through the hours, saw their flight with the case, re-lived their escape from the house at the first jangle of the fetters, heard the Baron's last great roar; and as this phantasmagoria flashed by and he seemed to rock in the centre of a crazy world, there came to him

a sense of the Baron's nearness, and the fantastic quality of the man seemed to fill the night until at last the very darkness, where so many strange things burgeoned, was nothing but his vast shadow. Then it seemed for a moment as if Helen, too, suddenly went towering to the stars with the Baron, so that the two were there, were everywhere, dividing all things between them, conjuring the dead planetary stuff into a million alluring shapes and giving it life with a breath. Was there not something the Baron had said, one of those odd significant remarks, something about his being between them . . . the Baron always in the thick of it inside . . . Helen always shining outside . . .?

But now he was perched on the log, laughing away, and Helen was there at the other side of two packets of sandwiches and a bottle of wine, laughing with him. They told one another that by some last stroke of wizardry the Companions of the Rose had been transformed into so much bread and meat and cupfuls of wine, but they ate and drank none the less heartily for that, and to one of them, as the happy sacrament went on its way, the mystery of the rescued case, so loudly celebrated between them, dwindled beside the wonder of their being there together in the empty sighing chamber of the night. Something came to bless the bread, add savour to the meat, and enrich the wine most marvellously; and now for a little while his pressing feet found happiness beneath them solid as a rock. As they ate and drank and talked so cosily together, he felt that he had at last burst through into another world. The old, hollow cheat had gone for ever. He remembered with a mingled pang of pity and contempt, that trumpery dilemma of the boy lingering outside the strange house in the night, that house which was always so enchanting from the outside and always so disillusioning within. It would be always like this, all days and nights, whatever was happening in them, would be like this past day and night, wherever Helen was. The magic of it would last for ever. Something that was not simply admiration nor wonder nor gratitude nor desire nor tenderness, but just a rush of strange emotion, came to shake body and mind together in one sweet and terrible grasp.

Their little meal was done and now they were standing up. She came closer to him, and he looked through the night into the deeper night of her eyes, now brooding over him. "You're

shivering, Adam," she told him. "You're cold."

He had been cold this long time, but had forgotten about it. "No, it's not cold. It's just excitement—or delight—or something—at being here with you." And then it seemed some hoarse, foolish cry broke from him, and he called her name.

What was it that came murmuring from her lips, and what was it that happened then; the quick, light pressure of a hand, the soft passage of a cheek against his, the sudden drift of hair and a summer's fragrance across his face? He flung out his arms but only clasped empty air and dimming moonlight. She was standing there beyond his reach, once more a vague shape, only a few yards away, but now it seemed as far from any grasp of his as a million miles could send her. Suddenly there came that hollow sensation somewhere in the pit of his stomach, and he began to feel a little giddy and sick, just as if he had been sent rushing down through space, and he dropped back on to the log and buried his head in his hands.

When he looked up again, quiet at last, she had returned to the car. "Are you ready now, Adam?" she called across to him, ever so gently. "I think we ought to be going."

He joined her without a word; but as her hand went out to the electric starter, he arrested it. "Before we go, Helen," he said very quietly, "tell me where this place is."

Her hand remained in his. "Why do you want to know?"

"Because I don't want it to float away into the blue once we have gone. I want to be able to take out a map, put my finger on a certain place and tell myself that once I was there and very happy. I want to be certain of the place, you see. As it is, I haven't the least idea where we are—the night's been all a jumble—or I wouldn't ask."

She looked at him for a moment before replying. "Perhaps it would be wiser not to drag it down from the blue and pin it to a map." He saw that she was smiling at him. "Perhaps it isn't on the map at all." But it was, and as she gently withdrew her hand, she told him where. Then she started the car, which immediately gave a curious jolt. There was a crunching in the road. "What was that?" she cried. "Did we go over something?"

"That," Adam replied, after a moment's deliberation, "was a small attaché case, the property of Baron Roland, that

was left lying in the road in front of the car." He had a vision of it lying there, flattened.

She nodded assent. "Shall we——?" she had begun, but out of his mournful vision he told her it would be absurd to return for it. Its work was done and now it was only so much crushed leather lying in the road. Perhaps one day, though, Hake would find it and carry it to Siddell. He could see the two of them, surrounded by files and black tin boxes, surveying it with solemn eyes. "Off we go, then," said Helen, "to King's End."

The journey there was so much roaring darkness and a bright frieze of jumping, startled walls and trees and cottages, under cover of which Adam sat silent, half in a maze of fantastic recollections, half in an ebbing dream. At last, open gates and the narrow entrance to a drive sucked them up, and finally Helen brought the car to a standstill before a locked garage. Words, idle and fleeting as summer flies, lightly buzzed between them. She climbed out; he followed and saw her open the doors, drive home the car, then turn the key upon it; but his eyes were as empty as if he were listening to distant music. Then she flitted away to the left, down some steps, and along a paved walk that brought them to the front of a low, stone house. He followed like a ghost. Another key turned in a lock, another door swung open, a little groping, then a click and a flood of light, and King's End had received them.

She led him across the hall, through a door, and then clicked on more lights. He found himself blinking at a long low room that was full of bright fabrics and books and little pictures and seemed amazingly and distressingly brilliant and solid, a world away from the night outside. It made him feel suddenly very tired, and when, with a vague murmur, she quitted the room, he sank down into an easy chair and closed his eyes. The room fled and the night came flowing round him again. Then a little noise made him open his eyes and the room returned, as bright as a new toy and as hard and clear-cut as a knife, and with it Helen, now without her hat and coat. He was struggling to his feet, but she smilingly waved him back. In this new hard light, she looked different, fascinatingly so because, in spite of the subtle changes, she was still the same lovely Helen. But she, too, was obviously tired. She seemed rather smaller, more fragile now; there was something shadowy about her eyes. His heart went out to her. He ached to put his arm about

the shoulders that now faintly drooped, or to fling himself down at her feet and lean his head against her arm as she rested in a chair. Already his tongue was shaping magic words.

"Hello, my dear! I thought I heard the car. Why this unexpected and dramatic return?" At the sound of this voice behind him, tired as he was, Adam leaped to his feet and turned to stare at a large sleepy man who had quietly entered the room through a door at the other end. He was wearing a dressing-gown over his pyjamas and had obviously just risen from his bed, for his hair was all tousled and his face still clouded with sleep. It was a broad, humorous, clean-shaven face, full of wise little wrinkles, and that of a man of thirty-five or so.

"Hello!" said Helen, coolly. "Jim, this is Mr. Stewart, who's been staying with us at the Baddeley-Fragges'." The large man sleepily twinkled at Adam and held out a hand. "And Mr. Stewart and I," Helen went on, now more eagerly, "have had the most extraordinary adventures."

"Of course you have!" said her husband, leaning against the mantelshelf, stifling a yawn, then grinning at them. "I know, I know! You've had some unparalleled adventures. The fact is written all over you, my dear. But, before we go any further, may we expect a visit from the police before morning?"

"Now don't be absurd," Helen cried. "Though, as a matter of fact, that's the very point. We've escaped from the police."

"And you've thrown them off the scent," he pursued, with a vague irony and a glance of humorous comprehension that Adam somehow found very disturbing. "Good! In that case, I propose we all go to bed. I've been asleep once, and I'm really asleep now, only I'm not in bed. You're tired out, I can see, my dear; and Mr. Stewart here, if he will forgive my saying so, looks rather fagged. There's a room ready for him, and I can lend him anything he wants. To bed, to bed, without another word, and then we'll have all the adventures in the morning, and I promise, if necessary, to have my mouth wide open and my eyes starting out of my head from breakfast to lunch time." And he beamed upon them.

Then Adam made up his mind. If he stayed, everything would be changed. He saw them all in the morning over the bacon and eggs, Helen and he by turns trotting out their fantastic little adventures under this large man's curiously disturbing eye; and

he heard their voices telling one another that it had all been very amusing, that he must come again to King's End, that they must lunch with him in town. No, he must go, otherwise it would all be gone, the last silken thread that stretched back through the enchanted forest would be casually twitched out of his hand. He must go, and at once.

"I'm awfully sorry—very good of you," he stammered, "but—really—I can't stay—must get back to town," It was the lamest stuff, but it would serve if only he could hold on while the storm of protest broke over him.

They told him how monstrous his proposal was. There was no train within reach until morning. He could be in town before lunch even if he stayed the night. He was tired. All these things they pointed out to him, but he grimly held on. He noticed, too, after a minute of it, that it was really a kind of elaborate game they were all playing. All the time she was protesting and pretending incredulity, Helen was questioning him with large, serious eyes, and he was answering her, just as if they were talking again in the wood. She seemed to know what secret need was driving him out, to limp down the long road. As he still held on, scarlet and stammering, to his fantastic decision, she mistily smiled at him, and her final glance, when the last protest had died, was like a rich warm cloak for his journey. But even her husband, who roared his amazement and disapproval, was only joining in the game, for under cover of his appearance of outraged common sense and baffled hospitality, he seemed to be watching Adam, almost brooding over him, with a queer sympathy flavoured a little with ironic humour. Had the man been suspicious or sullen or merely stupid, had he shown any signs of jealousy or mistrust or even silly complacency, Adam might have faced him, but these queerly comprehensive and faintly comic glances, so infinitely disturbing, only sharpened his desire to escape.

"Well, if you must go, you must," said Maythorn, smothering a yawn. "How are you going to manage it? That's the point to be settled now." He turned to Helen and added dubiously: "Of course, we could get the car out again."

"No, no!" Adam broke in, emphatically. "I shouldn't dream of allowing that. I can easily walk to the nearest station. As a matter of fact, I'd—er—rather like a walk."

In the silence that followed you could almost hear that last brave silly little remark scampering away to oblivion.

"What time is it now?" asked Maythorn. "Half-past two. Well, let me see. By the way, though, you must at least have a drink before you go. Whisky-and-soda?" He filled and handed over a glass to Adam, watched him take his first long drink with an affectionate solicitude that was almost paternal, then flicked his thumb through a time-table. "Yes, here we are. Now if you turn to the right outside the gate here, and walk forward about two miles, you'll come to the main road. Turn to the right again—you'll see the signpost—to a place called Ludworth, which is about four miles further on. There you can get a train about five o'clock that takes you to Muncaster, and connects there with the early morning express to London. I've caught it once or twice myself on very special and dreadful occasions. It's a breakfast train, and it lands you in town about ten o'clock."

"St. Pancras?" inquired Helen, with that little tilt of the head and delicately mischievous inflection of voice which Adam thought he would remember for ever. She glanced at him, and for one miraculous second it seemed to him as if everything were beginning all over again.

"King's Cross," replied her husband, "the terminus of the London and North Eastern Railway." There was a subtle suggestion of irony in the unusual precision with which he announced this fact. Then he turned to Adam again. "Well, if that's your programme, my dear chap—and I must say I don't envy you—then you ought to start fairly soon because you haven't too much time. I'm sorry we can't entertain you, but perhaps you'll stay some other time, and then we'll have the adventures out." He glanced smilingly at Helen, then bent upon Adam the last of those strangely disconcerting looks: this time it seemed to express a definitely half-comic sense of secret fellowship. "Helen will set you on your way. Good-bye." He shook hands and lounged out, but appeared to leave behind him a wise ghost that kept them silent.

They went out into the hall, where they remained while Helen threw a dark cloak over her shoulders, hiding for ever that bravery of white arms and crimson silk he knew so well. Still without a word, he held open the outer door for her, and she stood

on the threshold for a moment poised between light and darkness. Then she stepped out into the night and he followed her. As he quietly closed the door behind him, the thought came to him that this, too, was an escape, the last and strangest of all the fantastic escapes of the week, for now he could not clearly see what this durance was that threatened him, nor what freedom there was to beckon him out, and the whole thing was like some undertaking in a dream, where there are no reasons but only a harrying sense of urgency.

The waning night had no moon now but only a faint, blurred sheen of stars, and it was chill and heavy with dew, and the whole hour dark and tearful, and yet it seemed to Adam full of a mournful kindliness after the brilliant, staring little place he had just left. Now he was walking behind Helen, down a narrow path across a place of fragrance and drenched shadows that was the garden. Thick bushes and low overhanging trees suddenly and blackly massed themselves in front of them until it seemed impossible that the path should go any further. Before this deeper darkness, Helen halted, turned to whisper "Follow me," and stretched out a hand behind her for him to grasp. Bending their heads a little, they plunged into the mouth of this little black cave of leaf and shadow, and threaded their way through it hand-in-hand, finding themselves at last overlooking the road. There was a tiny gate in the wall there, and Adam opened it and descended the two steps that dropped down into the grey dust of the highway. Helen stood leaning against the gate. He looked up at her, seeing more than his eyes could ever have gathered in that dim light. Now he wanted to say a million things to her, so he would say nothing.

He gently disengaged the hand that rested on the top of the gate, and raised it to his lips. He felt it pass caressingly across his face. "Good-bye, Helen." It came in a whisper.

The hand was gone, and now there fell from the swimming shadow above him a tinier whisper still. "Good-bye, Adam."

With sudden violence, cracking the world in two, he swung away and hurried over a dozen yards or so of the road. Then he stopped and looked back, but there was no last glimmer of face or waving hand among those unbroken shadows. She had gone, and there was nothing before him but miles of empty road and the greying desolation of the sky. He ached now to run back and call

her name, but he turned away again and walked on. He walked slowly, for he was at the head of a vast procession and innumerable jostling and jangling troupes of memories, and he walked heavily, if only because he was carrying on his back, away into safety, a whole new magical world. Mile after mile, he limped on through the quiet dust, under freshening skies, moving in a mammoth dream that only ended at last in sleep, the sleep that fell upon him in the waiting-room of Ludworth station, where he was told that the five o'clock train had come and gone.